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GRACE LEE.

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GRACE LEE.

A Tale.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

AUTHOR OF "NATHALIE;" "WOMEN OF CHRISTIANITY;" ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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GRACE LEE.

CHAPTER I.

THE snow fell fast; soft, white, and noiseless it was borne past the parlour window. A gray sky, a white, hilly horizon bounded the outward prospect. Within all was touched with the red firelight: tables, chairs, cabinet, and mirror gave back the same warm and burning glow.

A gray-haired old man, with a harsh, sarcastic face, sat writing by the window. A middle-aged, good-tempered looking woman, sewed by the fireside; further on, in the back-ground, and half gloom of the room, a slender, dark-

haired and dark-eyed girl of seventeen, sat on a low stool, with a heavy quarto, a Hebrew Bible, on her knees. One hand supported her cheek; the other rested on the book; her eyes were fixed on its strange eastern characters, her long, drooping curls half veiled the page.

She was not, and never could be, pretty; yet her dark face had warmth and character, her eyes great beauty, and her young form much grace. Her name was Grace Lee. She was born far away, amongst Welsh hills, but she was an orphan, and for two years she had lived with her guardian, an old priest, Doctor Crankey, and his cousin, Miss Amy Crankey, in one of the wildest nooks of northern England. Doctor Crankey was a learned man; Miss Crankey was skilled in every art of the needle: both zealously taught the young girl all they knew, and thus an accomplished scholar and as accomplished a needle-woman grew up Grace Lee in a bleak and lonely home.

A gust of wind swept by the house; it died far away with a faint murmur on wild moors. The young girl bent her ear and listened. "How far that wind has come," she thought; "how far it must be going—how wide the world must be." She put her book away; she left the room; she went up to the highest part of the house, a terrace on the roof. The snow fell on her bare head; the keen north wind blew back her hair from her face, but her blood was ardent and young; her cheek only freshened to feel the blast, she only shook her head and smiled at the falling snow. She looked around her; a wide, white plain spread to the foot of white hills; a pale sky met a paler horizon; she clasped her hands on her bosom; she raised herself on tiptoe; she stretched her slender neck, and bent a keen, eagle look that seemed as if it would pierce every barrier. "Ah!" she thought again, "how wide the world must be!" and seized with a wanderer's

longing, she thought of burning Africa, of the luxuriant New World, of fair southern Europe, with the sun shining on her brown ruins, and the blue Mediterranean washing her antique shores.

“I wish I were a queen,” she thought, her head pensively inclined towards her right shoulder, “but a queen without her state, without her kingdom; what place, beautiful or famous, would I not see! what delight should not be mine! I would do great things; I would build cathedrals; I would found hospitals; I would erect palaces; I would make a cardinal of Doctor Crankey, a duchess of Miss Amy, a princess of Lily. I would have more jewels than a sultana, more robes than there are days in the year; and withal I would be so generous and so good, that every one should love and praise Queen Grace.”

“Grace, my dear,” said the gentle voice of Miss Crankey, from below, “will you come down and make the tea, if you please?”

The day-dreamer awoke, and laughing at her own dreams, she ran down lightly; she made the tea; the frugal meal was soon over; she returned to her Hebrew; Doctor Crankey to a seven years begun History of the Church; Miss Amy to a Penelope piece of embroidery. Quiet was the evening by the bright fireside; Grace did not feel it dull; study, too, has her charm—a charm more true than that of dreams, and almost as sweet.

Grace was, as we have said, an orphan. Two years before there had been sorrow and mourning in a once happy home of the little town of W——, in Wales. Mr. George Lee lay dead in his room, his wife slept in hers the same deep sleep, and two orphans, in whom their blood did not mingle, sat desolate and sorrow-stricken children in the silent parlor.

They had loved in youth: fate, under the shape of angry parents, divided them early; they yielded, parted with mutual consent, and

married happily elsewhere. When, after sixteen years they met, they were both free. Mr. Lee had an only child of fourteen, Mrs. Blount a little girl of eleven; their old love revived, they married, enjoyed one year's late and brief happiness, and died within one day of each other; each ignorant of the other's fate; each bequeathing to the other's care his or her child.

"Very distressing case," said Doctor Marsh, who sat drinking brandy-and-water in a back room, "and then what's to become of the orphans?" He addressed his assistant, John Owen, a dark and saturnine-looking young man, who sat opposite him with folded arms, and head bent on his bosom.

"Cannot they be lawyers, like their fathers?" he replied.

"Lawyers! Girls, lawyers!"

"Oh! they are girls, are they?"

"Bless me, sir, have you been visiting Mr.

George Lee a year, and don't you know whether his children are boys or girls?"

"I had not paid attention!" carelessly replied Owen.

"Well, but you can tell me what to do?" asked Doctor Marsh, to whom his young assistant was in all doubtful matters as an oracle.

"Apply to the nearest relatives," was the laconic answer.

"The Rashleighs? I suppose you know them."

"Mrs. Rashleigh is a worldly woman; her son is a fool, a libertine, and a pedant. We were at school together; he hates me—I despise him."

This was not promising; nevertheless, Doctor Marsh called on Mrs. Rashleigh, who resided in W——, and was distantly related to the late Mrs. Lee.

"I must decline interfering," coldly replied the lady, "Mrs. Lee's second marriage had not my approbation. It will be more proper, by far, to apply to Miss Lee."

“And pray give my compliments to Miss Lee’s dark-eyed young friend,” half yawned Rashleigh Rashleigh, who lolled on a sofa. When the Doctor was gone, he burst out laughing, and boisterously wondered “what Miss Lee would say to having that little yellow-haired monkey, Lily Blount, palmed off on her.”

“My dear Rashleigh,” gravely said his mother, “*that* does not concern us.”

Miss Lee was very rich and very old. She lived in a wild, yet lovely home, between the mountains and the sea. Doctor Marsh found her sitting in her chair, and chastising half-a-dozen unruly spaniels with an ebon crutch. With her he found a beautiful orphan girl, Margaret Livermere, whom she had reared as her companion, and an elegant, handsome man, Gerald Lee, the rich London banker, her favourite cousin and future heir. The Doctor asked to speak to Miss Lee alone; Mr. Lee stepped out into the garden; Miss Livermere slipped away by a side door: a while after

the visitor saw them vanishing together behind a group of trees. In the meanwhile, he explained his errand. Miss Lee received him very rudely. "Sir," she said shortly, "you are a meddling man. Mr. Lee's daughter and Mr. Lee's property are both confided to the care of a Doctor Crankey, a priest, and third or fourth uncle of the first Mrs. Lee, who was a Papist. I have nothing to do with *that* little girl. As to the other one, I am amazed at you. She belongs, by right, to a mad-woman, called Miss Blount, who has an eternal law-suit with the Walton Company, and is to have blue and yellow livery when she wins it. Another time, sir," she added, giving him a hard look, "you will do well to think before you act."

Rather abashed the Doctor withdrew; he found out the directions of Doctor Crankey, and of Miss Blount, and wrote to both. Accordingly, on the same day, and by the same coach, arrived a short little old man in

a rusty cassock, and a tall gaunt lady in shabby mourning. Without knowing one another they had quarrelled concerning a coach window which Miss Blount persisted in opening, and the Rev. Doctor Crankey persisted in shutting again. The house soon became too hot to hold them. Miss Blount was grand, and talked of the Walton Company, which she was going to crush; and of the blue and yellow liveries. Doctor Crankey said "Fudge!" and longed to be back to his History of the Church, and his quiet home in the North. To crown matters, Miss Blount took a hearty dislike to Grace Lee, whom she called a bold, black-eyed little thing; and Doctor Crankey as heartily disliked little Lily, in whose blue eyes he saw ingratitude written, and whose eulogy he kindly summed up with the reflection, "that Judas was fair-haired." In short, peace was not restored until the belligerent parties went each his and her own way, bearing off his and her ward as *spolia opima*.

“Thank Heaven!” piously said Doctor Marsh to John Owen, on the morning of that day; “I never have been more distressed.”

The young man smiled with lofty surprise, more scornful than sympathetic, then returned to the perusal of the heavy legal volumes belonging to the late Mr. George Lee, and which had found no purchaser in the preceding day's sale.

“Good-bye, Mr. John Owen,” said a soft voice at his elbow.

He looked up and saw a dark young girl standing by his side.

“You do not remember me?” she asked.

“No.”

“I am Grace—Grace Lee. I saw you yesterday reading these books; and before yesterday, too. They are mine. When I am twenty-one I shall give them to you. I lend them to you until then. Doctor Crankey says I may. Good-bye.” And before the

surprised young man could reply she was gone.

And now two years were passed, and passion and circumstance had scattered them all as the winds of heaven scatter seed on the surface of the soil, each to bear fruit in its season. Doctor Marsh alone remained in W——. His assistant, John Owen, had gone to London. There he had no sooner taken his degrees as a surgeon than he suddenly forsook medicine for the bar. Mrs. Rashleigh was in Paris, patiently waiting the return of her prodigal Rashleigh Rashleigh, who had gone to Baden-Baden with a pretty actress—his third or fourth affair of the kind. The beautiful Margaret Livermere was disgraced and banished; she had charmed too surely the heir and cousin. Gerald Lee was hesitating between love and mammon; Miss Lee was dying, full of wrath and disappointment. Lily Blount was in the south of England with Miss Blount; daily she heard of the Walton Company, and of

the blue and yellow liveries ; and daily she wished herself dead ; and Grace, happy in her wild, northern home, charmed her mind with classic lore, Hebrew, and romantic dreams.

“Child,” said Doctor Crankey, seeing her so assiduous, “you will get blind over that Hebrew. Amuse yourself a little bit with the golden-mouthed Saint John Chrysostom.”

And he handed over to her the ponderous Greek Father. At ten Miss Amy rose.

“Grace,” she began, then paused. Grace was fast asleep. Her arms were folded on the broad volume open before her ; her profane girl’s head rested on the hallowed page ; it was a favourite author, a rare and costly edition, yet Doctor Crankey only smiled.

“You need not waken her,” he said. “I want to speak to her as soon as I finish this paragraph.”

“Law ! Doctor, you surely will not blame the poor child if she fell asleep.”

"By no means," he interrupted; "good night, Miss Crankey."

Miss Amy sighed and left the room. She had once been young, and the gray Doctor too; and then they had been on the very verge of love: but Miss Amy was capricious and John Crankey was exacting; they parted coldly, he to take priest's orders, she to settle down into a calm old maid. When they met again, years had passed, and he could ask Miss Amy to keep house for him, and she could accept the office. Of the passages of their youth he remembered nothing, she but a little and that not often.

At length the paragraph was finished; Doctor Crankey turned to rouse the sleeper, and found her reading over his shoulder. He only smiled.

"Well! what d'ye say to that, Grace? That's touch-me-not, eh!" He rubbed his hands and chuckled. "You see, my dear, monks are very good people; but they live out of the

world, and I am an old man of the world, you see. Bless you, child, I know all its tricks and all its ways."

Grace went round and sat down on the hearth at his feet.

"What is it?" she said. "You had something to say to me; I heard you. What is it?"

"So, Miss, you were pretending sleep."

"I was asleep, but your voice woke me. What is it?"

"You have lost your third cousin and namesake, Miss Grace Lee—she is dead."

"I do not remember her. Must I go into mourning?"

"She has made you her heir."

"Ah! Why so?" quietly asked Grace.

"It was her fancy, and a woman's fancy is her law. Her first will was in favour of her other cousin, Gerald Lee, but he displeased her."

"How?" interrupted Grace, in her direct way.

"By marrying a lady, whom Miss Lee did not like—a Miss Margaret Livermere."

"Are they married?"

"Not yet; don't tease, child. What is it to you if they are married or not? Well, as I was saying, Miss Lee thought proper to make you her heir. She also thought proper to indite a letter, addressed to you, which you alone are to read. Now I scorn a lie as I scorn the devil, and what I think I say. My candid opinion is, that the late Miss Lee was cracked, and but that I rely on your judgment and principles, Grace, this letter you should never see. I warn you to read it with caution. Here it is."

He handed her a letter. Grace took it, broke the seal, read a few lines, and looked thoughtful, then slowly extending her hand, she dropped the letter on the burning coals. A flame caught

and consumed it; at once it shrivelled into a black scroll. Doctor Crankey looked at her a little anxiously; but she said quietly:

“There was nothing so wonderful in Miss Lee’s letter; a trust and a request; no more.

“Nothing touching your religion—nothing involving a principle of right or wrong.”

“No, indeed,” replied Grace; and looking up at him archly, she laughed.

Doctor Crankey breathed, relieved; a week’s anxiety had that sealed packet given him. He laid his hand on the young girl’s head, and smoothing her dark hair, he said, “Child! why do not you ask the amount of your inheritance?”

“Because I can guess: a hundred a year or so. Oh! I shall be quite an heiress!”

The priest bent his keen gray eyes on hers, so soft and dark.

“Child,” he replied impressively, “Miss Lee was rich; she called yearly thousands her own.

No one knew or knows how many. You are now one of the wealthiest women in all England."

The eyes of Grace opened; her lips parted with surprise. Doctor Crankey continued:

"God grant you may make a noble use of your wealth: God grant you may never forget gold is but dross in His sight."

She did not reply, but sate mute and still at his feet.

"Humph! you take it coolly. I thought you would jump with joy."

"Jump!" echoed Grace, with a start and a look of offended dignity. "What for? It is but money."

Yet, even as she spoke, a bright red spot burned on her cheek; her eyes shone with strange light; and as she sat with her arms clasped around her knees, she smiled.

"What are you thinking of?" asked Doctor Crankey, who was watching her.

She looked up, and replied earnestly : “ Doctor Crankey, who was it that went to the oracle of Delphi and chose the short and the glorious life—Alexander or Achilles ? ”

“ Never mind, child,” replied Doctor Crankey, who would not confess that he did not remember.

“ ’Tis no matter,” resumed Grace. “ I, too, in thought, went to Delphi this very morning—I, too, chose the short and sweet ; and, see, this evening the oracle is fulfilled.”

“ Go to bed, child,” interrupted Doctor Crankey, “ and let Delphi and all such heathenish fancies alone ; go to bed like a good girl.”

Grace gave her guardian a curious look ; but she rose docile and obedient. She bade him good-night, and went up to her own room, a nun-like cell. There she sat down and leaned her cheek upon her hand, absorbed in thought.

“ Indeed, you have been to Delphi,” whispered a secret voice. “ Yes, you, too, have done like Alexander—” and, looking up, she replied,

smiling: "What matter! one can put a whole lifetime in a few years; and better the quick and delightful than the wearisome and the slow."

And throwing back her head, like one resolved to chase all troublesome thoughts away, she rose. In a few minutes her prayers were said, and her young head laid on her pillow was locked in the slumbers fast and sound of seventeen.

CHAPTER II.



Who would not travel? Who would not feel strange suns; behold new skies; hear the greeting of foreign speech, and pass a wanderer amongst scenes beautiful and still; amongst nations living and moving, yet left behind with their passions, their contests, their hopes and sorrows, like the images of a dream?

Six years were past and gone. In a strange place—in a strange land the dreaming girl, who on a snowy day had wished herself a queen, read, as in a book, the vivid story of years of wandering. She saw broad seas and circling horizons; a boat cutting through the green billows, and leaving its brilliant track behind;

long blue lines of coast glittering through white mists; open ports with shipping, with bronzed sailors and fishermen, with all the life and all the noise of commerce. Then came sunny plains with their harvests, and brown peasant men and women looking up by the dusty road, as the carriage passed and vanished through scenes of soft rural beauty, by green hills with hamlet, church and churchyard, by calm valleys with hidden streams softly flowing in cool evening shadows. Then gay cities, all mirth and splendour, followed; then wild scenes, deep lakes sleeping midst stern mountains, with fir-tree forests and snowy brows, and sounding cataracts, above which on broad wing the royal eagle flew screaming. Then, past the mountain ranges, past the wildness and grandeur of nature, spread lands all light, all warmth and softness; lands of poetry, art, and beauty, with ruined temples and heroic battle-fields, now trodden by enslaved races; still farther and farther in the spreading

desert, within the shadow of the pyramids, by the ancient Nile, by forsaken kingdoms, she followed her own track until she came to an Eastern city, rising on an Eastern sky, to the gloom of an antique church where lamps burned before a sacred shrine, and like one wakening from a dream, she found herself kneeling by the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. For two years and more she had been a wanderer, and now her pilgrimage over, she had come to pray a last time where she knew she never could pray again.

Long before sunrise Grace had left Jerusalem. We will not follow her through the whole of her homeward track; it gave to her story a few bright pages more; it left images that enchanted her whole life, but it had no influence on her destiny. At Rome she paused and rested.

Miss Lee travelled alone; she was twenty-three, wealthy and fearless. Until her twenty-first birthday, she had remained in the North

with Doctor Crankey and Miss Amy, exactly as if no change in her life had occurred. Not until the very day she was of age had Grace entered on the full and double enjoyment of fortune and liberty. Then, indeed, spreading her wings like a long captive bird, she had taken her flight towards the burning East. Gold smoothed a path else too rough, and charmed away peril. She travelled in the style, with the suite; and with all the privileges of a princess. The world might have reproved this adventurous spirit in a poorer woman, but it admired and extolled it in the wealthy lady. Wherever she went, she left behind her a golden shower that won her still more golden opinions. In France she was Lady Lee, la grande dame Anglaise; in Italy, an English Principessa; in the East, she was the Sultana from the West, and she all but eclipsed the fame of Lady Esther Stanhope. In England she was plain Miss Lee, an eccentric, independent girl, who had travelled over half the globe, who

was prodigiously rich, and every one knows what *that* is in England, whom no one knew personally, and whom everybody was dying to know.

Miss Lee had a careless, artistic sort of temper; she did not seek or seem to value society; it came to her unsought and courted her notice.

The Baronne de Montreuil, wife of the French ambassador in Rome, had met and known Miss Lee in the East; she could not hear of her having any other home in Rome than Palace Colonna. A very charming Frenchwoman was Madame la Baronne, but then every one knew she was not eminent for disinterested friendships; that the Baron was poor; and that their favourite nephew, Eugène de Montreuil, owned nothing beyond his *salaire d'attaché d'ambassade*, barely sufficient, he disdainfully owned, to keep him in cigars. The Honourable Mrs. Chesterfield, the celebrated English beauty,

who reigned supreme over the highest of the several circles of English visitors in the Holy City, had no peace of mind or body until she succeeded in getting introduced to Miss Lee. Grace was not handsome, she was wealthy. She could not be a rival; she might be a very useful friend. Mrs. Chesterfield declared she was the most delightful, original creature; and both in the *grand*, but rather dull *monde diplomatique*; and in the little, but brilliant English world; Miss Lee, without effort, produced a decided sensation.

The princely Colonnas did not erect palaces for their descendants to let them furnished; but the pride of Italy is gone, and for years the French embassy has resided in the noble building which stands by the Church of the Twelve Apostles. As the Honourable Mrs. Chesterfield's carriage entered the wide court, and drew up before the broad staircase; she felt, with a little touch of envy, that she, the nobly-

born, but rather poor English beauty, had to vegetate in a furnished house; whilst this wealthy plebeian lived in a palace, guest to the ambassador of His Majesty the most Christian King. She crossed the ante-room, hung with grim-looking Colonnas: Miss Lee's French maid, and Miss Lee's courier, and Miss Lee's footman, were superintending a whole court of tradesmen from the Piazza di Spagna and the Via Condotti. Mrs. Chesterfield condescended to pause a moment and look on. Here a costly and elegant mosaic table was unpacked; an exquisite copy of the whole Roman Forum in Rosso Antico stood close by; and then there were marble cups, and vases, and bronzes beyond number; and a jeweller she saw with a morocco case; and a young man with a large band-box.

"You have enough to do," said Mrs. Chesterfield, smiling to Mademoiselle Dupuis.

"Madame can have no idea of it," replied

the French maid, with uplifted eyes. "Will Madame be so good as to pass this way? Mademoiselle is just gone to the garden."

"I shall go and find her; you need not come with me, I know the way."

Mademoiselle Dupuis would fain have remonstrated, but a gracious, yet imperious wave of the hand both checked and silenced her.

Mrs. Chesterfield walked slowly through that beautiful old Italian garden; the summer flowers of other lands there bloomed and grew in the winter air, redolent with the sweet scent of violets. The red orange glowed through its sombre leaves; the yellow lemon hung from its bending boughs, or Hesperides-like, the golden fruit was strewn on the dark earth. A clear fountain poured down from a stone niche full of green ferns, and flowed away with a broken sound. The whole place had a forsaken look; the mutilated ancient statues grouped around

seemed to gaze with a melancholy air down the silent and neglected path.

Mrs. Chesterfield took that to her right. It brought her to the last terrace. Gray sculptured masses of what was once a Temple of the Sun lay half buried in the earth. The God of Light looked down carelessly on his ruined shrine. On a fragment sat, or rather half reclined, Grace Lee. She wore a striped Tunis silk, of light texture ; it had the hues of a land of the sun, gorgeous, not gaudy. It was made in Eastern fashion, and suited both her figure and dark complexion. The vest and sleeves were fastened by carbuncle buttons, set with brilliants ; a narrow striped scarf carelessly tied around her ebon hair completed her attire. The sun that shone on her whole figure gave it warmth and brilliancy. She basked in its heat like one to whom it was life. She did not see Mrs. Chesterfield until the lady stood close by her, and said, softly,

"How can you bear that sun?"

"Very well, after that of Egypt," replied Grace, looking round laughing; "my mother was a salamander, and her daughter has an innate love for fire under every shape, but especially under that of yonder glorious globe. However, there is a cool bit of shade for you."

"Why, what have you been doing?" resumed Mrs. Chesterfield, as she sat down and saw that all around Miss Lee the ground was strewn with exquisite flowers. Grace laughed. A scroll of paper at her feet caught Mrs. Chesterfield's attention; she picked it up, unfolded it, and began reading:

"Anima mia"—

"A love sonnet. Oh! I must not be so indiscreet as to go on!"

"No, it is not a love sonnet," said Grace; "at all events, it is highly respectful. Every morning, in such a bouquet, I get one—Heaven knows from whom!"

“ I can enlighten you,” replied Mrs. Chesterfield, a little bitterly ; “ this is Prince Negri’s writing.” And for a while she was mute and thought :—“ This, then, was why he yesterday looked so cool as he rode past the carriage on the Pincio. Let him, mean, interested man !” Yet she sighed. She was beautiful, noble, a widow, but poor. Mario Negri was handsome, rich, and a Roman Prince.

Until the arrival of Miss Lee he had been sedulously attentive. Since the dawning of this new star coming from the East, with a halo of Eastern wealth and splendour around her, he had grown distant. Mrs. Chesterfield now knew why ; but she was a woman of the world. She could look dispassionately on such things, and like her unconscious rival none the less. She had fully recovered by the time Grace said, carelessly,

“ Prince Negri ; I do not remember. What is he like ?”

“Dark, handsome, and noble-looking.”

“So they are all; and then there are so many princes here!”

“Oh! but you must have remarked him; he is one of your hundred worshippers.”

“Have I a hundred! No wonder I should not know them all: but I think I remember Prince Negri. I sat by him at Princess Borghese’s, yesterday evening. He is agreeable.”

“Agreeable!” echoed Mrs. Chesterfield, looking piqued; “is that your kindest word for a man who wants to make a Roman Princess of you.”

Grace rose and stepped up to the terrace. On the ledge flowers bloomed in their stone vases; below lay Rome, with her church towers, her hilly horizon, her broad circling sky.

“I like Rome,” said Miss Lee; “I like her churches, where saints and martyrs sleep. I like her spoils of ancient art. I like, too, her ruins, though they cannot vie with those of Greece

or Egypt. I like her ancient palaces, her old gardens, her sunshine, and her sky. Yes, a strange, stately life, yet not without its solemn charm, must be the life of a Roman Princess. But this sun is getting very hot for you. Shall we go in?"

Through the gardens they returned to the palace. Miss Lee opened the door of the gallery; public visitors were not admitted that day; the keeper was absent; the pictures kept solitary state in the empty saloons. As they slowly passed along, looking and pausing, Mrs. Chesterfield carelessly resumed:

"Poor Madame de Montreuil! what will she say to prejudice you against Prince Negri, calling him a gambler—my dear, all the Italians gamble—and then she will try to bewitch you with gay Paris, and what she terms *une position politique*; both charming, especially with Eugène de Montreuil, the gayest, the most agreeable of gay and agreeable Frenchmen."

Grace was looking at a small landscape. She turned round and said, slowly,

“Une position politique, and in Paris, too, the most charming of charming cities? In France, where women once reigned—where they still rule; where, with position, and mind, and skill, one of our poor despised sex can still have her say in the world’s story. Mrs. Chesterfield, I should like it dearly.”

And with sparkling eyes she laughed gaily.

“So you would rather be a French Baronne than a Roman Princess, and rather a Polish Queen than either. Eh! ambitious creature?”

“A Polish Queen. How so?”

“Are you not bosom friend with Countess Karlski?”

“We met in Paris two years ago. We have again met in Rome, and we are friends. What of it?”

“And has not Countess Karlski a son, the most romantic, the most chivalrous and devoted

of Polish exiles, the great-grandson of a king?"

"Ah! what king?"

"I do not exactly remember. One of the German princes of whom Polish nobles made sovereigns, but a king he was; and here," she added, passing her arm within that of Grace, and leading her to a fine Titian portrait—"here is his descendant, whom the Venetian painted by anticipation. Here he stands before you; blue eyes, fair hair, noble brow, manly look, right royal bearing. When Poland rises from her ashes, a nation and a kingdom, why should not Stanislaus Karlski sway a sceptre—why should not Queen Grace wear a crown?"

"It would not sit well on her plebeian brow."

"This is the age of plebeian queens, who have been found to act their part as well as any born on the footsteps of the throne."

Grace looked neither surprised nor startled at the splendid though doubtful vision Mrs.

Chesterfield held forth. She gazed fixedly at the fair-haired and manly-looking figure before her; and smiling a little proudly, she replied, "Stranger things have come to pass! Well, it would be something to live for the redemption of a whole people; to see it breaking forth into joyful freedom after years of bondage; and to wear a crown doubly glorious, because so dearly won. Ah! Mrs. Chesterfield, you are an accomplished temptress."

"Then it is Count Karlski after all," thought Mrs. Chesterfield: anxious to clear this point, she resumed aloud, "I hope your majesty will be pleased to ask me to the coronation?"

Grace looked round over her shoulder, and said, smiling,

"When I came to Rome, and first heard of the Honourable Mrs. Chesterfield, an Italian lady, said to me: 'The beautiful English lady is going to enter the bosom of the Catholic church, and to marry Prince Negri!' From an English

baronet I heard another story. 'The *entente cordiale* is cemented : the niece of our Premier will soon be Madame de Montreuil.' From many, from almost all, I heard, 'Poland has found a rival in Count Karlski's heart.'"

Mrs. Chesterfield reddened and laughed, but she was silenced. When she spoke again it was of Princess Doria's ball, to which both were going that same evening. Thus discoursing, they came to the end of the gallery, and went on to Miss Lee's rooms. There they found displayed the various treasures which had already caught Mrs. Chesterfield's attention. The bandbox on being opened had brought forth a priceless lace ; the morocco case, antique cameos, fit for a queen, and known over all Rome for their beauty and great value. And Miss Lee had bought all, and could not even tell the price of the mosaic table, which Mrs. Chesterfield was curious enough to ask. All she knew was that it came from Ciapetti's, Piazza di Spagna : about its positive value she had not

troubled herself. "Very impertinent," thought Mrs. Chesterfield, who was rather noted wherever she went for driving hard bargains. Yet she stayed and looked on, dazzled, fascinated by all this wealth. It was nothing to her; it never could be hers; but it charmed her irresistibly. When at length she left it was to wonder with internal bitterness how many thousand scudi the extravagant creature had squandered that morning!

Scarcely was she gone when another door opened, and Madame de Montreuil entered. She was little, plump, lively, graceful. She wore a simple white muslin morning dress, but the embroidery made it sufficiently rich for an ambassador; her little cap, too, put on with the careless grace of a Frenchwoman, was of costly lace; her whole person was graceful and attractive. She came in, all smiles, all soft speech. She praised Miss Lee's looks, her taste, her purchases; then, with a sigh, she sank down into an arm-chair, and

glided into other themes. "The poor Baron was almost killed with work ; without Eugène she did not know what he could do ; indeed, the Baron had strong thoughts of resigning his political position, to this perfect nephew, who in the meanwhile was going to France, there to be duly elected for one of the southern departments."

"But first," added Madame de Montreuil, reddening slightly, "Eugène must marry ; for two reasons : firstly, he must settle in life ; secondly, he is richer in native talent and ancient blood than in the world's wealth, and now, *ma chère Grace*," she added, gently pressing her hand, "hear me with patience. I confess it, I am a woman of the world ; I speak its language, not that of romance. Will you be my niece ? Will you be the wife of Eugène de Montreuil ? He has not asked me to speak for him ; he can do that for himself ; but I know his feelings, and thinking that my voice might not be without influence, I ventured. I do not deny that Eugène and I

once thought of Prince Negri's sister, but everyone knows that her brother lost her fortune at an unlucky game of cards. I say it with regret, for Maria Negri is a charming girl, and her brother is not a habitual gambler. Eugène, too, was attached to this child of sixteen, but he cannot afford to marry a portionless bride, and so it is all over. You are a woman, and not an ordinary woman. Eugène has too much tact and good taste not to appreciate you; perhaps you, judging him from his aspect, may think him too light and careless, but, trust me, he has ambition, and subtlety and skill beyond his years. Nature meant him to be a political man; with a wife like you, rich, brilliant, born to be one of the world's idols, because you are original and careless, Eugène can rise and take you with him to the highest positions; and though wealth and its enjoyments are sweet, believe me, *ma chère Grace*, there is something worth both—*une position politique*."

And the pretty little Baronne took a diplomatic air. Grace had heard her very quietly, leaning back on her chair, her two hands on her knees. She now looked up smiling, and said: "I thank you for your frankness, Madame, and believe me I appreciate every advantage you offer. But—"

The light hand of the Baronne was laid quickly on her lips.

"Say as many 'buts' to Eugène as you please," she said gaily; "it is your woman's right; to me, my dear, say nothing, I only wanted you to know the truth and reflect upon it. And now," she added, rising, "I leave you. It is, unless I mistake, the hour for your promenade."

"I am only going to Countess Karlski."

"Charming woman; and what an interesting young man is her son; pity he wastes his talent on a dream! For you know, my dear, that with all the sympathy in the world, the

resurrection of Poland is a dream. How very well this Eastern sort of thing becomes you! You really look like something out of the Arabian Nights."

She gently pressed her hand, and with a gracious nod, and a pleasant *au revoir*, she left her.

Miss Lee's carriage was waiting below; in a few minutes it had taken her to Countess Karlski's.

In one of the many gloomy and narrow streets that run between the Corso and the Tiber, in one of Rome's ancient palaces, lived the two Polish exiles. The dwelling suited fallen fortunes. The decayed gate stood ever open; two antique columns adorned it; grass grew freely in the gloomy court; from a heap of rocks against the wall clear water pottered down into a shattered sarcophagus: it had once held the ashes of some proud Roman, it now served as a fountain; large green-leaved plants grew around in unchecked luxuriance. The

whole had in itself that air of neglect which pervades everything in Rome, from the Vatican to the meanest dwelling.

Miss Lee was expected. She went up alone the broad staircase. A whole family of beggars sat on the steps, taking their meal of yellow Indian corn. On seeing her they all stopped, and stretched out eager hands. She gave them a few coins, and went up to the second floor. In a corner of the landing, a large heap of dust had gathered; from the window out in the yard, wet clothes hung out to dry; on a mouldy looking door was nailed a small glazed card, with a coronet, and "*Madame la Comtesse de Karlski, née Lobskoi,*" printed in Gothic characters. Grace rang. A dirty, slipshod Roman girl, with a long silver pin in her hair, and a large beaded coral necklace round her brown neck, opened. Miss Lee passed through vast and lofty rooms, almost bare of furniture, until she came to a broad and melancholy saloon. The frescoed ceiling by

Piètro di Cortona, was full of mythological gods; the sculptured cornices had not lost all their gilding; mosaic work still adorned the marble floor; the walls were hung with faded arras; red damask, still more faded, covered the antiquated chairs and sofa. Before a large round table, heaped with papers, in one of the deep window recesses, sat the Polish countess; a little white-haired, fairy-looking woman, in a rusty black velvet robe, and fantastic black lace cap, trimmed with a profusion of jet ornaments. She sat very still, reading, with her head bent towards her right shoulder: the street was narrow, the high houses opposite hid all view of the Roman sky; a subdued light fell on her diminutive figure, all but lost in the vastness of the room. On hearing Grace she turned round, and rising with a joyful cry, she ran up to her, talking very fast in French, which she spoke with perfect ease and much grace. Time had been with her, but it had taken no light from

her brilliant restless eyes, no sweetness from her fascinating smile, no lightness from her agile movements. She rose on tiptoe to kiss the cheek of Grace ; she made her sit down in her deep chair, then, darting around the table in search of some stray paper, quick and light as a humming-bird, she said, in her eager, rapid way,

“ I have been longing for you—this morning brought the most triumphant news—everything is ready ; in two months Poland shall be free ! You must come and see me in Warsaw,” she added, pressing her hand.

She seemed overflowing with gladness ; but Grace had too often heard the same tale of hope and triumph to be startled. The Countess resumed :

“ I speak on the authority of my own correspondents ; as usual, Stanislaus tells me nothing ; but I know that your last munificent donation to the cause has given us arms, men, ammunition. All is ready, Russia is crushed ! ” She drew up

her slender form, and her bright eyes sparkled like diamonds. "Yes, *ma chère Grace*," she resumed, laughing and patting Miss Lee's dark cheek, "you have had the honour to help to crush Russia!"

"*En attendant*," replied Grace, smiling, "do not forget that I am come to take you to the Colosseum."

"Yes, I remember; Stanislaus too is coming. Ah! I shall be sorry to leave Rome and my noble palace; and the garden opposite, where birds sing all the day long as I sit here dreaming of Poland."

Miss Lee surprised looked for the garden: in a dingy window opposite she saw a few flower-pots with kitchen herbs hanging from iron bars, and in an old cage a shabby blackbird.

"Yes," sighed Countess Karlski and her bright eyes grew dim, "I shall think of thee, beautiful Rome, even in Warsaw: I have met with such sympathy here. Yesterday I was presented to

his Holiness: he gave me a particular benediction; not in words, but in looks that went —*here.*”

She laid her hand on her heart with much emotion: before Grace could reply, Count Stanislaus Karlski entered the room.

The Polish exile was one of the remarkable men of Europe; but he had no country, no true sphere of action; all his energy, all his talent, were wasted on a hopeless cause. His mother had poured her ardent spirit into a vase nobler than her own. Unlike her, he never breathed a word of his hopes, fears, or plans; he never spoke of Poland, very rarely of Russia, but his life was devoted to raise one and wound the other. If he failed, it was because the task was superhuman.

In appearance he was calm and serious; his manners had the ease and simplicity which high birth and good breeding impart. Women he had the gift to charm without effort, by a mixture of tenderness and respect, which he had learned in

the daily intercourse of a mother he fondly loved. With men he was not so successful. Some called him a visionary, others an adventurer ; he was unfortunate ; and men are not like women, they despise misfortune. Grace liked and esteemed the exile, and he returned the feeling : ever since she had come of age, she had, unsolicited, for he was too proud to beg, given large sums from her ample fortune to forward the cause of Poland, or aid her suffering children. Her modesty and reserve heightened in his eyes the value of her princely gifts. She never questioned him, she never presumed, she never interfered, but gave, for the pure and simple pleasure of giving.

Count Stanislaus was habitually grave ; on this day Grace was surprised to find him gay. He laughed and jested with unusual mirth ; even his mother smilingly asked what ailed him. But when they reached the Colosseum, to which they were driving, his spirits suddenly subsided. The

Countess went up to the central cross and knelt on the lower step. Grace and her son slowly walked up and down the grass-grown arena ; it was lonely, quiet, and beautiful.

The sun shone brown and warm on the gaunt skeleton of this dead giant of a past age ; green things ready to break out into bloom, grew on it everywhere ; the pale but exquisite Italian sky looked in through every shattered arch and window, and spread above the broken upper outline, in cloudless blue. Peace and stillness enclosed the whole place. They saw no one save a solitary old man in tattered cloak and pointed hat, who sat on a broken column. On seeing the two strangers he came up to them, and holding out his hand displayed, with a smile, his little treasures ; two or three defaced old coins, a few pieces of broken mosaic. Before the ready hand of Grace could draw forth her purse, her companion had given him a small alms, and he was gone. Count Karlski looked

after him smiling. "His name is Julianò," he said; "we are old friends. Early as I come here, late as I may leave, I see him before or leave him after me. The Colosseum is his realm, that ragged cloak is his regal mantle, that old hat is his crown; foreigners are his born tributaries. Watch him now; two well-dressed men are crossing the arena; he goes not near them; they are Romans, and with a look Julianò knows it. And he too is a Roman; he has the full dark eye, the aquiline nose, the well-cut Roman lip and chin. With his white beard flowing on his breast, and his mantle thrown around him, with the grace of the ancient toga, he might sit for one of the Roman senators, from whom he is perchance descended. And he lives here, in this ruin, happy to get a few baiocchi from the careless stranger, whose ancestor, perhaps, died in this very spot, a barbarian gladiator. Ah! these," he added, looking around him, "these are the things that comfort one under the heavy

hand of Providence. The proudest, the most tyrannic nations, have their day of retribution; the oppressed may safely look forward to the avenging future; but in the meanwhile the present is bitter."

"Would you be anything but a Pole?" said Grace, smiling.

"No, heaven forbid!" he replied, quickly; "but then," he added, sadly, "who would be a Pole—no one; even you, good and generous as you are—you would not?"

"Why not?" asked Grace.

"Oh! if I indeed thought so," he said, looking at her fixedly; "if I thought so!"

Grace stopped, he stopped too; his eyes were fastened on her with a strange expression; words seemed to tremble on his lips. At length he spoke.

"Miss Lee, you have been a generous friend to Poland! Will you become her daughter, and share the fortunes of her banished son?"

Few things took Miss Lee by surprise, because her perceptions were quick and received impressions rapidly. Her reply came at once.

"What for?" she asked, "Poland wants no such daughter—an exile no such burden."

He reddened and bit his lip. She resumed:

"Have you thought of this long?"

"You think me presumptuous," he answered, with a sad smile, "because I offer you a nobler destiny than the life of pleasure and wandering you now lead. Forgive me, if seeing in you the promise of nobler things, a heroic nature that knows not itself, I asked you to become the daughter of poor Poland—poor now I grant it, yet who knows that some day her rewards to the faithful few may not exceed her poverty."

And this great-grandson of a king, more ambitious, perhaps, than he himself knew, looked at Grace with reproachful pride. She smiled and shook her head.

"I am not what you think," she said. "My

friend, get a Polish peasant girl, pour into her the sense of burning wrongs; of a noble nation effaced from the rank of nations; of a language silenced, of a faith oppressed; do if you can, what God alone can do, kindle and inflame a human soul, create a new Joan of Arc, then indeed will you have done something for Poland."

"Oh! that I could—that I could—but you wrong yourself—besides you have not heard me—will you hear me, Miss Lee?"

She bent her head in mute assent. He spoke with the strange, seducing eloquence, that had before that day moved and conquered many a reluctant heart to the cause of his country. Grace listened to this strain of sweet music with a charmed ear; but she was not convinced. He read it in her look, and said quickly:

"Give me no answer yet—the penitents are coming in for the *Via Crucis*; when it is over, tell me what you have decided."

The procession entered the arena singing ; the men ranged themselves on one side, the women on the other : a young monk ascended the platform and preached briefly but impressively of sin and repentance ; an older monk stood by him in a grave listening attitude. The people sat or stood dispersed around, on the grass, on the steps of the cross, on the broken marble fragments. Then followed the stations.

Around this once blood-stained arena fourteen lowly altars record the steps by which the Man of Sorrows reached his bitter Passion and shameful death. Before each of these altars successively the crowd knelt, prayed, and sang ; a strange impressive scene, with the blue sky looking down, and the old walls giving back these sounds of song and prayer.

Countess Karlski was lost in devotion ; Grace could not help looking at her son. His brow was unusually grave, his whole face unusually clouded ; he seemed absorbed in thought. " He

wants to play some desperate game," thought Grace, "and to make me the stakes. Ay, he likes me well enough to immolate me to that supreme love of his heart—Poland!" Suddenly he raised his eyes and met hers; he smiled as if conscious of her thoughts, and Grace too smiled, for her resolve was taken.

All was over, the chanting of the procession died away in the distance. Countess Karlski rose. She raised herself on tiptoe and whispered mysteriously in the ear of Grace: "Do you mind waiting five minutes—I have a particular prayer to offer up." Grace assented, and sat down on the step of one of the deserted altars. At once Count Karlski came and sat by her.

"Well," he said, smilingly, and there was strange sweetness and fascination in his smile and in the look of his deep blue eyes, as leaning his elbow on his knee and his cheek on his hand, he looked at Grace.

"You are going to make a new revolu-

tion," she said. "I ask no questions, I state a fact."

"A shrewd guess. Do you not know I live in revolutions?"

"Well, then, frankly, a revolutionary atmosphere would not suit me."

"Is that your final answer?"

"My friend, it is."

He looked at her reproachfully. The eyes of Grace were bent on the earth, and her forefinger traced on the sand the figures of a number. He followed her movements with a curious eye. "Would that do?" she asked, looking up laughing.

He started and reddened.

"You are jesting," he said; "even you, rich as the world, says you are, even you could not."

"All at once I could not. But within six months—try me."

It was some time before he spoke. At length he looked up, and said very earnestly, "You are a noble creature!"

The prayer of his mother was ended. She rose and came up to them cheerful and smiling.

Miss Lee reached Palace Colonna in time for the ambassadorial dinner. The ambassador himself, Madame de Montreuil, her nephew, and Grace were the only persons present, but the very dining-room had a diplomatic air, as indeed had everything around. His Excellency M. de Montreuil, was a diplomatic man, tall, spare, austere in aspect, laconic in speech—the man to wear a gold-embroidered coat, riband, crosses and orders—to figure well in public ceremonies, to look properly deep and solemn at a ministerial dinner. An impenetrable man, from whom no one, not even Madame de Montreuil, had ever been able to extract anything, but whether because of his great depth or of his utter shallowness, Madame herself never could make out. He never breathed a word of politics; he read all the newspapers, took notes of the cases of extraordinary longevity, spent an hour every morning with

his secretary, rode every afternoon on the Pincio, lived like any other gentleman, and had the name of *un homme d'état*.

On the present occasion he was, as usual, courteous to Miss Lee, but somewhat silent; when the dessert came in he went to the open window, sat in his chair and read the *Débats*. Eugène de Montreuil, a fair-haired, slim-waisted, thin-moustachio'd dandy, amply made up for his uncle's silence. He spoke on, *à tort à travers*, with that light sparkling French wit, which lies in manner, in a certain precision of speech rather than in the substance; in the form, more than in the meaning. He entertained the ladies with the small talk of the day: the Duchess de Croy had left Rome; the Princess Sobenhausen was just arrived; Principessa Russoli was going to marry her daughter to a certain English Catholic nobleman, as yet nameless. And to all appearance these trifles absorbed him; yet to a close observer the ambitious man was betrayed by the

restless look; the smile that vainly tried to be careless. In the same light way he treated his forthcoming election. He gave a frank account of his intentions. He meant to pay assiduous court to three ladies, and through them to win their influential husbands. The task was not, he confessed, without difficulty.

“Madame de Broc detests Madame de Gersueil, who detests Madame de Ménard. Ah! it is a delicate matter;” and the shadow of a thoughtful wrinkle gathered on his smooth brow. “I must manage them separately,” he added, seriously.

“But what if you find yourself with the three?” asked his aunt. “Confess yourself conquered.”

“Conquered!” he answered, passing his hand through his chesnut hair, “conquered! why in that case Madame de Broc and Madame de Ménard must be charmed together. There can be no rivalry, for they are not enemies; or what

is almost as objectionable *entre dames*, bosom friends."

"Thank you," said Madame de Montreuil.

He bowed, and resumed. "Then I must fasten Madame de Broc's attentions on some ill-dressed lady, refer Madame de Ménard to some third person for a little bit of new scandal, in both of which having succeeded, I devote myself to Madame de Gerseuil."

"You are eluding the difficulty. I spoke of the three together."

"And let them be together," was the heroic reply. "*Seul contre trois*, the single Horace against the three Curiatii, I shall yet prevail. I shall unite Madame de Broc and Madame de Ménard; make Madame de Ménard slightly subordinate to Madame de Gerseuil, and Madame de Gerseuil slightly subordinate to Madame de Broc. She who hates will feel the shade; she who hates not will feel nothing."

"Is he not impertinent?" said Madame de Montreuil to Grace.

Miss Lee smiled. Eugène, convinced he had produced an irresistible impression, was going to improve the matter, when the voice of the ambassador issuing from behind the open *Débats*, was heard reading aloud—

“‘On the fourth of this month, there died in the town of Annecy in Savoy, a woman named Jeanne Leroux, aged one hundred and fifteen years, five months, and three days.’ Very singular,” added his Excellency, “this is the best and most curious instance this year has produced.” He took out his pocket-book, noted the circumstance, and resumed his reading.

“I suppose we must begin and think of that dreadful toilette,” said Madame de Montreuil, rising and passing her arm within that of Grace. She led her away, whispering mysterious advice, and pathetically entreating her, whatever she did, “not to wear yellow.”

“Another bouquet has come for Mademoiselle,” smilingly said Mademoiselle Dupuis, as Miss Lee

entered her dressing-room. Grace loved flowers ; with delight she bent over the delicate blossoms.

“ And there is a letter too,” resumed her maid. This time the letter was prose, not verse ; but the poet’s name, Mario Negri, was clearly written below. It was a love letter, but a respectful one ; its purport too was marriage, and very clearly stated. Grace read it attentively, then put it away with a smile. “ He, too ! ” she thought, and she mused awhile. But little time had she to reflect ; first, her toilet, then Madame de Montreuil’s presence, occupied her fully ; at length both the ladies were ready. The ambassador was attired with taste and richness ; Grace with unusual simplicity. She wore a plain white Eastern muslin, a gold diadem that bound her dark hair, and but one ornament of real value, the cameo bracelet purchased that morning.

“ Very good taste,” approvingly murmured Madame de Montreuil, “ very.”

There never had been in Rome a more beautiful fête than that of Princess Doria. The splendid rooms looked doubly splendid. The softness of music, the sweetness of perfumes, filled the whole place. There were soft speeches, softer smiles and glances, beautiful women,—all that could charm the senses and the eyes was there. Mrs. Chesterfield was present. Her first task had been to seek out for Grace. She saw her standing at the end of the ball-room talking to some ladies; then, with involuntary but irrepressible jealousy, she beheld Prince Negri carelessly yet surely approach the wealthy lady. There was something in his handsome dark face bent on pleasing, a meaning which had once been there for her, which she knew well.

“I do not know why I should care about it,” she thought; “he is but a false Italian after all: a gambler, too, and then there would have been that horrid abjuration to go through. He must be saying something very pleasant to her that

she smiles so." She could not take her eyes away. Grace looked animated and well, Prince Negri was eminently handsome, even in his country of handsome men and women. He looked a Prince, too. In vain Mrs. Chesterfield longed for some one to break a tête-à-tête, all the more secure for being held in a crowd. But images shift not more quickly in a dream than in a ball-room. A friend, or rather a bore, came and asked her "to look at the most beautiful woman he had seen for a long time." Mrs. Chesterfield remained mute at his impertinence, then dropped her eyelids, used her fan, looked cool, and shook him off like an insect. When she looked again, both Grace and Prince Negri had vanished.

It was some time ere she could see them again; at length she discovered them in a card-room, playing, to her great surprise; several ladies and gentlemen looked on. Mrs. Chesterfield joined the group, as Grace rose laughing.

Prince Negri looked rather flushed. Mrs. Chesterfield lingered behind to know more. She could learn nothing. Some said Miss Lee had won a thousand scudi, and others avowed she had lost, we dare not say how many thousand, and all in one game. "Do tell me what all this is about,"—said Mrs. Chesterfield to Madame de Montreuil, "who lost or won?"

"Heaven knows," replied the Baronne with a careless shrug, "do look at her; is she not handsome? 'The most beautiful woman in the room,' says Eugène."

Mrs. Chesterfield looked and saw a young and lovely woman, with the inspired beauty of a Sappho or a Corinna, leaning on the arm of a tall and handsome man. She recognised Gerald Lee. This, then, was the young girl whom six years before he had married for love; she turned pale at the sight of this new star, on whose path a murmur of admiration rose; but with feigned indifference she said carelessly:

"Pretty woman ! but where is Miss Lee ? "

" There, opposite you, dancing with Eugène."

It is pleasant to dance with Frenchmen ; they dance well ; they like dancing ; they like their own charming selves : in a discreet way they like too their partner ; pleased with everything and everyone, they rarely fail to please. Eugène de Montreuil did his best to amuse Miss Lee ; he fully succeeded ; he saw it, and as he led her back to her seat, "the right time is come," he thought. In the French *grand monde*, a man is much too polite to be in love with the lady he wishes to marry, and there is no knowing by what speech expressive of respectful admiration M. de Montreuil would have declared his feelings to Miss Lee, if she had not suddenly said :

" I do not see Prince Negri's sister."

Eugène de Montreuil smiled rather bitterly.

" I dare say not : they say she is in a convent —soon to take the habit."

“ ‘They’ is a storyteller. I do not believe it; ask Prince Negri if you like.”

Eugène de Montreuil turned round quickly. He saw the Italian standing near enough to have overheard their last words—he reddened. Prince Negri with a smile confirmed Miss Lee’s assertion. “His sister had made her election—for the world.”

Self-possessed, as Eugène de Montreuil habitually was, he could not conceal some emotion, on hearing news he little expected.

“I told you so,” said Grace, laughing. Here she was joined by Mrs. Chesterfield, and the favourable moment her late partner had allowed to slip by, returned no more that evening.

“Do tell me,” whispered Mrs. Chesterfield, “what you were doing in the card-room?”

“Playing.”

“Did you lose or win?”

“And do tell me!” said Miss Lee, without answering the question, “who is that lovely woman?”

“Oh! you ought to know,” replied Mrs. Chesterfield, biting her lip, “she is your cousin, Mrs. Gerald Lee. They have been three days in Rome: she is consumptive, I believe. They too—so I am told—were in treaty for that bracelet on your arm, but you unconsciously outbid them; and as gold rules everything in this world—you conquered.”

Gerald Lee and his wife were leaving. He looked at her fondly and proudly; and smiling she returned the glance. They had been married years, but their love had not grown cold or old. The look of Grace followed them until the crowd closed on them: then she said with much warmth, “God bless them both!”

“Dreadfully dull affair,” impatiently exclaimed Mrs. Chesterfield.

“Delightful, indeed!” said Grace, misunderstanding her meaning.

Well might she find it so. Introduced by Madame de Montreuil, and recommended by her

large fortune, Miss Lee, wherever she went, might reckon friends by the dozen. Before Mrs. Chesterfield could reply, a gay group had claimed the attention of Grace; and the beauty saw this rich plain girl, possess and enjoy flattery, almost as sweet as any that had ever been poured at her feet.

And her brown cheek was flushed with pleasure; and if her bright eyes looked laughing through the enchantment of the fête, they yet sparkled like diamonds. Did she then like all this homage? why not. Oh, world! thou art indeed a charmer. We may rail at thee; we may call thee, false friend, traitor, yet thou ever drawest us back; thy breath may be too feverish, but it is sweet; thy voice may be false, but it is delightful.

“Oh, life, thou art sweet!” thought Grace. She sat in her room alone, thinking. She was too independent not to do singular things now and then; and too imaginative not to like them

all the better for being singular. She was young, too; romantic, and generous to folly. Full of faith and hope, and with the happy presumption of inexperience; never doubting her power to do good, she smiled at the remembrance of that day. She saw a brother saved from life-long remorse, a reluctant girl restored to liberty; a worldly man tasting one sweet drop in his worldly life; and glorious, though delusive vision, a nation liberated—all through her!

Mademoiselle Dupuis broke in on her dreams; she laid a sealed letter before her mistress and withdrew. Grace looked at it curiously; it was sent by her solicitor, with an apology for the neglect of the clerk who had forgotten it in some obscure drawer of the office. It was directed to Miss Gertrude Lee, in a free round hand she knew not, bore a date two years back, and was thus worded:

“MADAM—Thanks are poor things. I suspend

mine until I can prove to you that I know how to use the books your kindness now converts from a six years' loan into a gift.

“I have the honour, Madam, to subscribe myself, yours obediently,

“JOHN OWEN.”

“MISS GERTRUDE LEE.”

With a smile Grace put down John Owen's letter. It seemed strange to be reminded of so slight a gift on a day when she had poured forth gold like dust. Yet she smiled happy, for she saw herself a girl again standing by the careless young man who then had not known her face, who now did not remember her name, and scarcely deigned to thank her: sweet at all times of life is the memory of our youth! That short, haughty letter, had a strange charm for Grace. She read it again and again, until it brought on the restless fit the last few weeks had lulled. The next day but one she had

left Rome. Where she was gone no one knew. Some said back to Egypt, others to Sicily and Spain; but no one blamed.

Miss Lee was long remembered in the Holy City; strange tales were long told of her generosity and munificence. Every one knew she had given her magnificent lace to Mrs. Chesterfield, that the best part of her costly Roman treasures had remained in Palace Colonna, and that the day before going she had ventured to send her cameo bracelet to Mrs. Gerald Lee, with a letter so frank and so free, that her husband had permitted her to accept the gift. Some said, too, that she had portioned Prince Negri's sister, in a strange fashion, and others declared that she had given millions to Count Karlski; and all agreed that Grace Lee was rich as Croesus and generous as a queen.

CHAPTER III.



THE sun shone in Italy warm and golden, but the wind was bleak in England. With a dreary murmur it swept around the quiet northern dwelling where, on a wintry day, Grace had dreamed of endless wanderings. Years had passed invisible over the place; the fire burned as bright; the parlour looked as cheerful as then; the same figures too were there—Doctor Crankey bending over his History of the Church; and within a few paces of him, Miss Amy, sewing by the fire-side. The dark girl, listening to the far wind, with the Hebrew Bible on her knees, alone was absent.

“Now that is too bad of Grace,” said

Doctor Crankey, putting down his pen. "Is the girl dead?"

"Oh! dear Doctor, I hope not," nervously observed Miss Crankey; "when she last wrote she said, 'I left you when the swallows were going; when they return, look out for me;' and you know the first swallow came last week, and——"

The Doctor impatiently requested to be allowed to write. In five minutes, however, he returned to the same theme.

"Grace," he began; here he paused; the door had opened, and Grace herself had entered.

She came in bareheaded, like one just summoned from some domestic task, in a plain dark gown, such as she wore formerly; the same in bearing, aspect, and attire as of old. Miss Crankey's work fell on her knees; the Doctor uttered a deep "Hem!"

"Is it time to make the tea?" said Grace to Miss Amy—"or can I go on with Saint Basil

a little longer?" she added, turning to the Doctor.

They remained mute; Grace laughed, and sat down between them. She laid her head on Miss Amy's lap; her hand on the old priest's knee. Miss Amy sobbed hysterically; Doctor Crankey, who scorned emotions as so many weaknesses, said drily:

"And so that's the way you come back from Egypt, without a thing on your head, eh?"

"Egypt!" cried Grace, with a start; "you do not mean to say I have been to Egypt, or that I was not here yesterday? Nonsense!" she added, her head sinking back on his cousin's knees, "I could tell you where we left off in Saint Basil, just as I could tell Miss Amy it was a blue pink with yellow leaves she made me work last night. I pleaded for green foliage; but she said yellow would look better with blue."

"That's very true!" half sobbed Miss Amy; "the dear child has forgotten nothing."

"I'll be bound she has forgotten her Greek," half grumbled Doctor Crankey.

Grace indignantly denied it; poor Miss Amy suppressed her sobbing, to act as peacemaker. It was as if years had not passed; as if Grace, still a girl, had left them but a day. And of her travels, of anything that had occurred since that time, she refused to speak. Unattended, alone, in plain attire, her suite, her luxuries left behind, she had come to them to drink a deep, refreshing draught from the sweet fountain of the past. Grace had been about an hour with her two friends, when the parlour door opened, and a fair-haired boy of sixteen, with large brilliant eyes, entered, with a book in his hand. On seeing Grace he paused. She, too, looked at him a little surprised.

"It is only James Crankey, my nephew," said Doctor Crankey. "Come in, James; you must not be afraid of Grace, though she does know Greek rather better than you do."

The young man took no notice of this speech ; he sat down in the place which had been that of Grace for years, opened his book, and never once raised his eyes the whole evening.

Doctor Crankey had had a younger brother, who died in Wales. This brother turned out to have left Doctor Crankey a nephew, who one day dropped down on his uncle with a brief explanation :—" his mother had sent him."

Doctor Crankey was very angry ; then he softened ; then his heart yearned to the boy ; and at length he loved him. At once he set him to Greek and Latin, and " James, though not so quick a pupil as Grace," proved a good lad. All this Miss Amy told to Grace the next morning.

Silent happy weeks of peace followed Miss Lee's return to the home of her youth. To Miss Amy's delight she began a magnificent altar carpet, in Berlin wool. Greek, to Doctor Crankey's disgust, was wholly neglected ; yet to her, when too much engaged himself, he gave

the task of superintending his nephew's studies. James Crankey was rather mortified to have this feminine tutor; but his uncle would hear of no demur, and the lad submitted. But either the keen northern air, or hard study disagreed with him; for after some time he fell ill. Miss Amy nursed him tenderly, and to her he seemed grateful; but when Grace occasionally attended on him, to be civil seemed as much as he could do; his uncle, however, having severely lectured him, James professed his repentance, apologised, and threw a shade more of courtesy in his behaviour towards Miss Lee. He was slowly recovering, spring was smiling in the North, when, on a bright April morning, Miss Crankey mysteriously requested five minutes' private talk with the Doctor.

"Certainly," he replied, surprised; and he prepared himself to hear that really Miss Crankey could no longer stand the behaviour of Ann the cook; that a change there must be, &c.

"I do not know," began Miss Amy, "if you have noticed, Doctor, how slowly the dear boy is getting on. I am afraid he is rather worse than Mr. Bell thinks."

"Pooh ! pooh ! the lad is growing."

Miss Amy coughed, fidgetted, and looked for the most distant fashion of hinting her meaning ; but finding nothing, and perceiving that the Doctor was growing impatient, she came out with—

"My dear sir, that is not it ; your nephew—the fact is, your nephew is in love."

Doctor Crankey opened his mouth and sank back in his chair, aghast.

"In love !" he said at length ; and with what ? In the name of all the saints, with what ? With Ann ?"

Miss Amy smiled, and shook her head.

"With you, then ?" shortly said the Doctor.

"With me !" exclaimed poor Miss Amy, with a blush and a sigh.

‘But, my dear madam, with whom else?’

“Why, with Grace, of course.”

“Nonsense!” derisively said Doctor Crankey; “that is out of the question, you know. Grace is not a girl, or a woman.”

“Eh!” exclaimed Miss Amy.

“I mean like another. Why, ma’am,” he impressively added, sitting straight in his chair, “why Grace is almost as learned as myself, and I am a priest and a Doctor of Divinity to boot—Besides you forget that the boy cannot bear her.”

“Bless you, Doctor, he only pretends. James is a nice lad, but he is sly, he makes believe to hate her, that neither she nor you may guess the truth. Me he does not mind; that is why I detected him. I thought it right to tell you, because though he is so young it is a pity he should suffer.”

With this Miss Amy rose and left the Doctor confounded at the folly and deceit of boys and

girls. He rose and walked up and down the room, disturbed at so strange a matter. Suddenly as he passed by the parlour window, the Doctor caught sight of his nephew and Grace in the garden. He paused and looked.

They sat reading together some classic author under a young cherry tree, whose light shadow waved to and fro on the grass. The book rested on Miss Lee's lap. The fair head of the youth looked over her shoulder; her eyes read the page, his read her bending face unconscious of his gaze.

They were reading Virgil. They had come to the beautiful and well-known passage where Venus in huntress-guise appears to her son Æneas in the wood,

“—Pedes vestis defluxit ad imos,
Et vera incessu patuit Dea.”

“That is like you,” said James Crankey, in a low breathless tone.

Grace looked up, her dark eyes all surprise;

his blue eyes, all light, were fastened on her with a sort of worship.

“Thank you, Mr. James,” said Grace smiling, “a very pretty compliment—if it were only true; but I am not handsome you know.”

“Ah! but you have such beautiful eyes, and such beautiful hair,” he replied, but trembling at his own audacity, “and such a beautiful hand and arm, and—and then you are so—”

He paused.

“Pray go on,” said Grace seriously, “I should like to know my own merits; so what?—Good—”

“You are good, but that is not it.”

“Learned! Amiable? No. Why Mr. James what can it be?”

“You will laugh at me if I tell you.”

“On my word I will not.”

“Well, then, you are so elegant.”

Grace gave him an astonished glance.

He sat looking at her with a sort of breathless admiration, but it was as innocent as his years.

As she was hesitating what sort of a reply to give him, Doctor Crankey, opening the parlour window, raised his voice and said sharply,

“James, come in, I want to speak to you.”

James rose and complied. Doctor Crankey calmly informed him that he intended him to complete his studies abroad, and bade him prepare to leave in a few days. The boy reddened. He knew well enough what all this meant, for his mind was subtle and penetrating beyond his years.

“I do not wish to leave England,” he said.

Doctor Crankey frowned, but curbed rising wrath to reply.

“Well, I shall see if I can find some place for you in London.”

“I will not go to London,” was the deliberate answer.

Doctor Crankey’s gray eyes flashed fire; stern words of authority rose to his lips; suddenly he checked himself: James Crankey stood before

him, pale as death, but with inflexible will stamped on every one of his slight effeminate features. A vivid picture of his youth rose before the priest; he saw his own father sternly enforcing his will on his own brother, the father of James; he saw that brother's pale face of still revolt, the very image of the face before him; and he remembered how, when that brother left his home the same day and never returned, but made himself a home and died amongst strangers, he had in his heart blamed his father's harshness. He sighed and said, mildly:

"We will talk about that another time, James; and now, boy, leave me. I want to write."

In the course of the day Doctor Crankey briefly told Grace what had passed, and, without entering into any explanation, he added: "And now, Grace, persuade the boy, if you can. I will not force him; but if he will not yield, he must simply go back to his mother."

Miss Lee, without asking on what ground she was chosen for this office, promised to do her best. That same day she sat alone working at her frame in the parlour, when James Crankey entered. He took no notice of her, but went and sat at the other end of the room.

"Mr. James," said Grace.

He looked up, but did not move.

"I wish you would come here."

He came, his book in his hand.

"And sit down there," said Grace, pushing towards him the stool on which her feet rested. James sat down. "And just hold this skein of silk for me, will you?"

If Hercules wielded a distaff to please his beloved, poor James, who was but a boy, might well hold a skein of silk for Grace Lee. When she had half wound it off, she sank back on her chair like one tired with the task, and, looking down in the lad's blushing face, she said, smiling:

"And so, Mr. James, you will not go to London—why so?" He did not reply. She resumed: "I quite hoped you would come and spend some time with me there."

"You are going to London," he interrupted.

"Did you think I meant to stay here? No, indeed; I mean to coax away Doctor Crankey and Miss Amy; and I hoped, too, Mr. James, to coax you."

James reddened deeply.

"But since you will not—" said Grace.

"Anything—anywhere with you," he exclaimed, bending over her hand and pressing his lips to it in a transport of joy and fondness.

"Oh! Mr. James, Mr. James," cried Grace, "my poor skein!—"

James rose abashed.

"It is done for," said Grace, smiling; "and it was my best skein."

Thus matters were compromised. James Crankey naturally thought to leave the North

with Miss Lee, but Doctor Crankey wanted to consult a book in the British Museum; he could not delay his departure a day; he exacted that his nephew should accompany him, and this time James Crankey thought it wise to submit.

They were gone, and Grace remained alone with Miss Crankey. The spring was beautiful and pure, and fresh as the morning. The days seemed long as summer days; the serene nights were all repose, and as the season of the year so was the life of these two women. They were alike in nothing; yet they were fondly attached; Miss Lee loved her old guardian better than any other living creature, but next to him stood Miss Amy; Doctor Crankey was certainly first in Miss Crankey's heart, but after him came Grace, and in this common affection their mutual love met and strengthened.

Grace had succeeded in coaxing Miss Amy to promise to accompany her to town; but not without regret had Miss Amy agreed to leave

her quiet home. London bewildered her, she said; Grace only laughed at her fears. They sat together by the open window; the sun was setting behind faint blue hills; from the far horizon came long rays of light and dark shadows, that swept across a vast landscape. Grace remembered the Roman Campagna, the Appian Way, the tombs, ruins, circuses, fallen palaces, and broken aqueducts, that stand in the midst of that silent desert; and what she remembered Grace described to her friend in vivid and glowing language.

"Yes," said Miss Amy, rather sadly, "it must be beautiful—there are lovely spots in this valley of tears."

"Valley of tears!" echoed Grace, with a joyous laugh; "dear Miss Amy, this world is a paradise; life is a cup almost too sweet."

"You are young," said Miss Amy, in a low tone. "Grace," she added, after a pause, "I feel a little poorly to-night—do you mind going

up-stairs and shutting up—I cannot trust Ann.” Grace readily assented; Miss Amy remained alone.

“I too was young once!” she thought, as she sat dreaming by the window. She went into the past; years vanished from her brow; her young form, her fresh face, her light step, returned. Amy was a girl again. And in the cool of early morning, with the dew bright on the grass, Amy ran out in her father’s orchard. She filled her apron with the fallen fruit; she sang the burden of an old ballad; she listened for a whistle, for a harsh yet loved voice that called out “Amy!” The voice was no dream. “Amy, where are you?” it said, “Amy speak, are you here?”

It was Doctor Crankey, who had unexpectedly returned. Miss Amy rose. She clasped her hands.

“John! John!” she cried, “I never liked Richard; indeed, I never did.” And she sank back in her chair.

When Grace came in bearing the light, she paused on the threshold at the strange sight she saw. Miss Amy had fainted; Doctor Crankey stood by her supporting her head; his gray locks swept her pale face; his trembling lips muttered unusual words of endearment.

Grace sprang forward to her friend; she took her in her arms; Miss Amy was inanimate and cold. Still senseless, they bore her to her room. A doctor was sent for; he came, and looked grave. Grace sat up by Miss Amy the whole of that night, the whole of the next day. Miss Amy never woke to consciousness. The surprise, the sudden shock, had acted too strongly on a frame long weakened by a secret and patiently-borne disease. On the third evening she opened her languid eyes, smiled at Grace, on whose warm bosom her weak head rested, at Doctor Crankey, standing with folded arms at the foot of her bed, and with that smile still on her lips, she died, gentle as she had lived.

Doctor Crankey bore the loss of his quiet cousin with a Christian fortitude some would have called indifference ; but at the end of a fortnight he suddenly said to Grace :

“ Grace, I cannot stand it any longer ; I must leave the house.”

And then Grace learned, that to live in the home which the death of his cousin had rendered vacant, was more than harsh Doctor Crankey could bear.

He was a man quick to resolve, and prompt to act. In a few days he had sold off all he possessed, save his books, and he left with Miss Lee the cottage where the last fifteen years of his life had been spent in happy peace.

Before she left, Grace went into the garden. She gathered the flowers Miss Amy had loved to tend ; she went up to the closed and silent door, that never more would open to give her welcome. She laid her lips on the spot which had so often yielded to Miss Amy’s gentle hand, and her bright eyes filled with tears.

“God bless you, little house,” she said in her heart. “I have been very happy in you, God bless you; and blessed, too, be they who shall yet sit by your hearth, who shall know the shelter of your roof: again and again from my heart I bless them!”

She turned away, and gave the solitary dwelling, the quiet garden, the lonely landscape one last fond look; yet more of love than of sorrow or regret. Never more did that calm picture greet her eyes. Once, in after days, she was near the spot; she passed on without seeing it. She kept her lost home as she had left it—a fair image of her happy youth.

CHAPTER IV.



“GRACE,” said Doctor Crankey to her, when they reached London ; “I am a priest, a studious man ; you are a girl, gay, rich, and young. I will live under your roof, but I cannot share your life.”

Thus it was agreed between them.

A house in Park Lane awaited Miss Lee ; it was luxuriously furnished, but to luxury she added elegance and taste. She collected ancient pictures ; she purchased the best productions of modern genius. Miss Lee was soon known as an enlightened patroness of the fine arts. Grace liked clever people—who would not like them ? She liked intellect, brilliant speech, the seduction

and the charm of prolonged conversations. She took a matchless cook; she gave Thursday dinners; and she had clever people to pick and choose from. Her circle, or her *coterie*, call it as you will, soon became one of the most *recherché* in London. The time for literary patrons is over, else who knows of what modern Tasso Grace might not have been the Leonora. As it was, more than one poem was sung in her praise; more than one book, destined to live as long as the language, was dedicated to her, and shall bear her name down to far posterity.

Miss Lee was no courtier of the great; but she had too much tact and taste not to appreciate the ease, the polish, the good breeding, the grace which, as a general rule, the nobly born possess; and they, to do them justice, did not give her time to pine for their charming society. It was surprising even to Miss Lee's candid temper, how many earls, how many countesses, marchionesses, and viscounts, lords and ladies of every degree,

she had unconsciously met abroad, and been introduced to. Grace was heartily ashamed of her bad memory, and finding her acquaintance claimed by so many distinguished and agreeable persons, did her best to make amends.

She had not mixed much with the world ; she naturally committed some blunders and fell into some mistakes. But she had an original turn of mind, free and natural manners. She was pronounced "*piquante*"—a charming creature.

Within a few weeks she had been presented, invited to the great court fancy ball, where the splendour of her middle age costume excited universal admiration ; she stood one of the highest in the high world ; her cup of honours was full. At least she thought so ; but it having become known, Heaven knows how, that she was learned, various societies, of whose existence she was unconscious, elected her one of their learned corps, and thus to her amusement Grace woke one morning and found herself an academician.

The sun of this world may not be the truest and the best; but it is sunshine. In its light and warmth the glad southern nature of Grace revelled freely; charmed, but not deceived, taking the world as it is, she enjoyed her splendid fortune, and everything that fortune could give; and no morose wisdom, no sour philosophy, brought so much as a shadow on her brow. When flatterers went rather too far she laughed; when the designing ventured too much on her credulity, she generously forgave them. The evil, as well as the good side of things she saw, but at the good and fair side alone would she look.

Yet spite this tendency, and it is a dangerous one, Grace forgot not the suffering and the needy ones of this world. Like all persons of a joyous nature, she was generous. It delighted her to give, even though her gifts were not needed. She loved to see happy faces around her, and sometimes she used to say that she hated but one thing in this world, and that was a sad face.

More lavish, perhaps, than wise, she gave to whosoever asked. Better err by giving too much, she said, than by giving too little. Begging letters, applications of every description, poured upon her. They exhausted neither her patience nor her liberality. She would have thought herself niggardly of spirit had she stopped there. On every charitable or liberal institution, far or near, her hand invisibly poured a golden shower. The simultaneousness of the gifts, a certain character that pervaded them, struck observant and curious persons; they commented, they conjectured, they could not imagine who it possibly could be. At length their suspicions lit on a certain illustrious personage of noted benevolence—Her Serene Highness Princess Amelia, and having found so worthy an object, there complacently rested.

And Grace, amused to find their sagacity so wide the truth, pursued her round of secret and bountiful charities, of pleasure, of gaiety, of

intercourse with the great, with the gifted of this world, and night and morning she said to herself, "The world is beautiful ; life is sweet !"

Towards the close of the season, the Honourable Mrs. Chesterfield left Rome, and returned to England. There, to her great surprise, and to use her own words, she found everyone raving about Miss Lee. Miss Lee had jewels fit for a queen ; Miss Lee had more changes of attire than there are days in the year ; Miss Lee gave the most exquisite dinners, the most brilliant parties, the most beautiful balls ; Miss Lee had the most splendid liveries, the most elegant equipage, and if Miss Lee was not by this a duchess, Miss Lee might blame herself. To crown all, Miss Lee had turned out to be an admirable horsewoman. She had bought, and what was more difficult, she rode, "Vagabond," the most beautiful, the most perverse, the most dangerous of spirited Arabians ; "Vagabond," who, spite his beauty, his ebon coat, his flowing

mane, his eyes of fire, had been sold five times within nine months for his misdemeanors; "Vagabond," who had so irreverently upset the Premier, and thereby caused a change of ministry, a fall in the funds, and nearly brought on a European war.

"I am not of an envious nature," thought Mrs. Chesterfield, "but really if there was a thing I wished for, it was to ride that creature, and now the aggravating girl has taken him from me; I always had a longing for him since he broke poor dear uncle's ribs."

Spite this provoking incident she called the very same day on the aggravating girl. She found Miss Lee richly dressed, stepping into her carriage, with a large shaggy Newfoundland to keep her company. In her off-hand way, Mrs. Chesterfield at once proposed sharing her drive to the Park, but in the same breath observed,

"You do not mean to say you are going to have that creature with you?"

“Poor Scamp!” said Miss Lee, patting his rough head, “he is quite harmless; however, since you object to him, let him stay within.”

And to his own displeasure, and to the lady’s great satisfaction, Scamp was ordered away.

“Much more pleasant than having a great big dog with one,” said Mrs. Chesterfield, reclining back in the luxurious carriage, “‘Scamp,’ too, did you christen him?”

“No, indeed; I even attempted to unchristen him, but he would answer no other name.”

“A fit companion for ‘Vagabond.’ Is it true that you ride him, and that people stand in rows to look on?”

“That I ride ‘Vagabond,’ is quite true; that people stand to look on, seems to me rather doubtful, for six in the morning is my hour. But you give me no news of Rome.”

“Dreadfully dull place,” half-yawned Mrs. Chesterfield. “A little after you left, Prince Negri being fairly ruined, made a vow never to

touch a card, and married his sister to Eugène de Montreuil, who proceeded to France with his bride, got elected for I know not what unlucky department, and now represents his country, and makes speeches in the Legislative Assembly of France. As to Count Karlski, of course you know his unfortunate end. He was mad enough to get up another Polish insurrection, and was shot dead in the first engagement, which, after all, might be the very luckiest thing for a restless spirit like his. I wonder what has become of his mother ? ”

“She is dead,” replied Grace with a sigh. “She died unconscious of the truth, happy and hopeful to the last.” And for a while she remained silent, for she remembered the Colosseum, and the Countess praying by the cross, and she and her son walking up and down the green grass, and now all this was past and gone, like the shadows on the Roman ruin, like the beauty and the light of that Italian day. Mrs. Chester-

field did not allow her to reflect long. As carriage after carriage passed and Miss Lee and those within received and gave tokens of recognition, the beauty, who had been some time out of England, began to wonder at this extensive acquaintance, and, not knowing or remembering who half the people were, questioned Grace. The most aristocratic names, English and foreign, dropped from Miss Lee's lips; had she been reared in the very centre of the great world, she could not have been more easy and careless. Mrs. Chesterfield leaned back in the carriage, looked at her, and said with her well-bred impertinence,

"Why, you know every one. Well, and who is this, now?"

"The wife of a foreign Chargé d'Affaires; she is very handsome and very like Mrs. Gerald Lee: how is she?"

"My dear, she is dead. She was consumptive, I never thought that pink colour of hers was

natural; she died in Rome last May. Her husband left Rome at once."

"Dead!" said Grace, "that beautiful creature, of whom he was so proud, so fond. Ah! death is indeed pitiless!"

"Very true. However, he bears it admirably, and by way of driving away grief is giving himself up to philanthropy. He is now deep in the Female Asylum—what do you think of it?"

"The Female Asylum! Ah! I remember reading something of it in the papers; a sort of place of refuge for destitute girls, founded by a poor girl since dead, Abigail Smith. I understood it was going to ruin."

"Abigail Smith! What a methodistical name. However, as you say, the whole thing was going to ruin when that dear creature, Princess Amelia, sent a thousand-pound note. At once a committee was formed, and now the Female Asylum is in a fair way of becoming the most useful, interesting, and flourishing establishment of the

kind. It is self-supporting, or very nearly so ; it has manufactures, it has baths, a library, a lecture-room, a wash-room—I know not what. Dear Princess Amelia, she is indeed a benefactress of humanity !”

Grace looked amazed. It so chanced that the results of her munificent, but carelessly given donation, had not reached her ear. She had never intended to do more than relieve from temporary distress an interesting establishment, and now she heard herself called “ a benefactress of humanity.”

“ Have you never seen it ?” resumed Mrs. Chesterfield. “ Why then you really must, and this very day ; it is no farther than Clapham.”

Miss Lee raised no objection, and to Clapham they accordingly went. The carriage drew up before a large unfinished brick building in the Elizabethan style, which had already replaced the narrow house, where for years Abigail Smith had sheltered a few girls as obscure as herself.

Already was the stately gate adorned with FEMALE ASYLUM, in broad gilt letters. In answer to the footman's ring, a pretty girl in close white cap, blue gown, white cape, and black apron, the uniform of the establishment, opened the door and showed the ladies through a gay flower-garden to the house. There, in a cool, green parlour, they were received by the head matron, Mrs. Jones, a formal and reverend person in black silk dress, who sat making entries in a broad ledger.

"And how are we getting on, Mrs. Jones?" patronisingly said Mrs. Chesterfield. "I have brought Miss Lee, that she may become one of your customers."

"We shall be most happy," replied Mrs. Jones, looking at Grace rather condescendingly, "and we are getting on very well indeed; more orders for baby-linen came this morning; and there is to be a public dinner, as our chairman was just telling me."

"Is Mr. Lee here?" interrupted Mrs. Chesterfield.

"Yes, ma'am, writing in the board-room."

"Oh, we must go and see him; you don't object," she added, turning to Grace.

"No, certainly."

To the board-room they went. A solemn-looking room it was, with stiff grey curtains, big books, large chests already full of papers and parchments, with a large plan of the Female Asylum in a frame; a view of the same, ditto, and a little wooden model of it on a stand. It also had a green baize square table, before which sat Mr. Gerald Lee reading and sorting papers.

He was but little altered, for he was a cool man of the world; one who locked grief so deep in his own heart, that God alone knew what became of it there. Yet as he rose to receive the ladies, and as he saw and recognised Grace, a slight change came over his face, but it quickly passed; and when Mrs. Chesterfield said, in her

off-hand way, "Now, Mr. Chairman, do show us over this place, will you? and do not leave us at the mercy of that pedantic old fool, the head matron," Mr. Lee smilingly assented, and at once complied with the lady's request.

"Insolent creature!" exclaimed Mrs. Jones, who had unfortunately overheard the disrespectful speech, and resolved to show Mrs. Chesterfield "that she and not her ladyship was head matron of the Female Asylum," she followed the ladies out of the board-room.

Their first visit was to the wards, large airy rooms, that held one hundred snow-white beds; thence they proceeded to the wash-house, where half-a-dozen girls were deep in soap-suds, and another half dozen were busy drying, starching, and ironing. Thence again they went on to the kitchen, where more were cooking; and where they were shown, triumphantly, a kettle of immense size, and extraordinary loaves.

"So much," said Mr. Lee, "for the domestic

part of the house, and now for the intellectual." And leading them up again, he opened a door and showed them into a pretty room furnished with book, globes, slates; and where four intelligent looking girls sat drawing, reading, and studying. They looked up a moment on seeing the visitors; then demurely returned to their different occupations. "This is our library, class, and lecture room," resumed Mr. Lee, as they left, "we hope to have a much larger one when the building is completed; and now Miss Lee, I shall take you to the vital part of the establishment,—the work-room."

The work-room was a vast hall, where seventy or eighty girls in white caps and collars, black aprons and blue frocks, divided and sub-divided, overlooked by two matrons, ruled by six monitors, were all busily and variously engaged. Some cut out the work, and some put it together; and some sewed it with the finest of fine sewing: some made lace; some plaited

straw, some embroidered; in short, every easy female labour by which some money can be earned, seemed represented in the Female Asylum. There was no actual speech, but a low murmur like that of a busy hive filled the room. Through the windows the sunlight streamed in rays of gold. It lit up every group of girls in their plain but neat attire, with their young and cheerful faces. Grace was charmed, and turning to Gerald Lee, warmly expressed her approbation.

“Yes,” said Mr. Lee, “it is not amiss. The person,” (poor Abigail you were a “person,” not a lady), “who first established the Female Asylum, was certainly most praiseworthy; but she was ignorant and had narrow views; we have certainly improved on her plan.”

“Oh! it is beautiful!” enthusiastically exclaimed Mrs. Chesterfield, “and you have no idea how cheap they work: French cambric handkerchiefs, beautifully embroidered, seven-

and-sixpence a-piece. Everything was much dearer in the time of that Abby Smith. But as Mr. Lee says, it is all now on an improved plan. Thanks to an excellent committee, and admirable chairman," she added, laughing.

"And a thousand-pound note," he replied, smiling.

"Inded," said Grace, very earnestly; "I can assure you I never contemplated working such marvels."

Mr. Lee and Mrs. Chesterfield looked at her. "You," at length exclaimed the lady, "do you mean to say it was you sent the thousand-pound note?"

Grace now conscious of her self-betrayal, remained mute. She could not deny, and never equivocated.

"Well," resumed Mrs. Chesterfield, with increasing surprise, "you certainly are odd! The idea of letting every one think it was Princess Amelia who had sent that money."

Before Grace could reply, the head matron had stepped forward, and in a voice of the deepest emotion, began :

“Your Serene Highness.”

“Nonsense! Mrs. Jones,” impatiently interrupted Mrs. Chesterfield; “this is Miss Lee, not Princess Amelia, and—” She could not go on. The whole work-room was in a state of confusion and disorder. Cutters-out, putters-together, lace-makers, straw-plaiters, embroiderers, matrons and monitors, had suddenly suspended every task; first to gaze with open-mouth and eyes at the giver of the thousand-pound note, then to gather around and press as near her as they could.

“Mrs. Jones!” indignantly exclaimed Mrs. Chesterfield, feeling too great a pressure on her aristocratic shoulders, “will you keep off these girls!”

“Young ladies!” solemnly began Mrs. Jones—vain attempt—her voice was at once drowned

in the universal rumour and confusion. Various were the statements that flew from mouth to mouth. "Princess Amelia was come;" "Princess Amelia was the dark lady;" "No, the fair lady was Her Serene Highness." But, dark or fair, it was agreed that she had just presented the chairman with another thousand-pound note. The natural result of such exciting news was an increase of confusion. In vain Mrs. Jones called out severely, "Monitors, what are you doing?" The monitors were at the head of the rebellion; in short, authority was set at nought; "Mrs. Jones was amazed at them, she was." Mr. Lee, after vainly attempting to re-establish order, gave it up. Mrs. Chesterfield was highly disgusted; and Grace laughed heartily.

"Mr. Lee, will you see us safe into the carriage from this female mob," at length said the beauty, in great scorn.

Mr. Lee made way for them, with a smile;

the carriage was safely reached ; Mrs. Chesterfield stepped in, looking sulkily at the whole Female Asylum, which had poured out after them ; and Mr. Lee was handing in Grace, when a pretty girl of sixteen, with a blush and a curtsy, presented Miss Lee with a nosegay of newly-gathered flowers. Scarcely had Grace thanked her, smiling, when the head matron, to whom some invisible genius had in the meanwhile wafted her best cap, stepped up to begin a formal address. Grace forestalled her.

“ Mrs. Jones,” she said, “ I have a favour to ask of you. Firstly, then, will you be so good as to forgive these girls their somewhat unruly behaviour ; and secondly, will you, in my name and with my best wishes, give them a holiday and a treat.” She slipped some gold pieces into the matron’s hand ; Mrs. Jones smiled and curtsied, whilst a deep murmur of satisfaction testified how grateful to their feelings the inmates of the Female Asylum found the latter

part of this speech. Grace looked at them smiling; their pleasure made her glad. She saw them flushed and joyous; their eyes fixed on her with eager interest and curiosity—all anxious to win a smile, a look; many audibly uttering their admiration of her person, of her eyes, of her hair, of her rich silk dress, of her carriage, of her horses. She heard some blessings, too, and drove away with a light heart. They were only girls—only poor girls; but they were human beings, and for the moment the whole homage of their hearts was at her feet.

Vain were it to describe the state of excitement in which she left the Female Asylum. At length it partially subsided, and with Mrs. Jones's solemn approbation, a committee was formed to sit and decide on the important question: "What piece of their own work the inmates of the Female Asylum should offer to their benefactress?"

And now Grace was known as a gay sister of

charity ; as a sort of Mrs. Fry in the world. Nothing serious can be discussed or accomplished in England without a dinner. At that dinner, which was to put the finishing stroke to the Female Asylum, Miss Lee's health was proposed and drunk with immense applause. No school, no asylum, no charitable institution, but had her name first on its lists, but ranked her amongst its patronesses. Her name was mentioned with honour in public meetings ; her presence was solicited as a favour. She was requested to preside on committees, she received addresses and deputations ; she was, indeed, as Mrs. Chesterfield had said, " A benefactress of humanity."

Oh, Abigail ! Abigail Smith ! sleeping in your neglected grave in the Clapham churchyard, what were your years of toil, your youth wasted in superhuman labours, your very being sacrificed to heroic duty,—what were they, when weighed in the scale of human respect, and human opinion, with some money ?

CHAPTER V.



THE dull light of a London day stole in through the dim glazed window of a miserable London attic. It was low, narrow, meanly furnished, with an indifferent bed, a rickety chest of drawers, a ragged carpet, plenty of heavy books, and no dearth of dust. By the table, vainly studying, sat one whom we have seen before.

He was a man of thirty or so, tall, thin and stern in aspect. His dark, deep-set eyes, and swarthy face, were both ardent and resolute; every line was deep and passionate; every feature had its meaning, but that meaning, though not mean or evil, was not pleasant. There was too

much indifference, and too little of true content in the seeming repose of the brow; something too unquiet and gloomy in the bent look; too reckless a smile played around the scornful lips; the face, though evidently that of a man of intellect and education, bore too much the wild and lawless cast which may become a life of liberty, but which jars with the restraints of civilisation. It betokened, and truly, one to whom inward or external subjection was unknown; a proud, stiff-necked, self-willed man, whose temper had no more of the beautiful or loveable than his outward appearance, and yet like that too, was not without a certain careless and unconscious greatness as plainly pervading his whole nature, as it was stamped on his brow, and impressed in every dark lineament of his mien and motion of his bearing.

Hatred of obscurity had induced John Owen to forsake his original profession for the bar. Sanguine in the resources of life for whosoever

knows how to control and master them, and confident in his own power of ensuring success, he had given time, money, labour, and like a bold mariner, risked his all in one venture. And now, when all he could do was done, he could not land and claim the realm he had conquered; but, within view of the shore, he was tossed on a sea of miserable doubts and delays. He could have borne a total wreck better than this tantalising suspense. Conscious of his powerlessness, he fumed in his attic like a lion in his den. Was he, day after day, to haunt courts where his voice could never be heard? To become the laughing-stock of men who, without the one-tenth of his talent, were eminent and famous? Was he to waste in miserable struggles for his daily bread, for the clothes he wore, and the shelter of a roof, in reports for the newspapers, in paltry little articles for third-class magazines, the energy, vigour, and living eloquence meant

to serve nobler purposes and a higher ambition?

A knock at the door disturbed these bitter and discouraging reflections.

"Come in," sharply said Mr. Owen.

A slipshod servant girl half opened the door.

"Please sir," she said, "Mrs. Skelton would like to know the time."

Mr. Owen took out his watch, a handsome gold repeater.

"It is just six," he replied.

The maid went down with the reply to the owner of the house, Mrs. Skelton, a widow of kind heart and small means.

"And you saw his watch?" said Mrs. Skelton.

"Indeed I did, ma'am."

"Well, Ann, watch or no watch, I'll be bound that Mr. Owen has eaten nothing to-day. I looked in his cupboard and drawers last night, and there was nothing in either; and you know, Ann, that the whole of this blessed day he hasn't

been out. So where's the food to come from? How did he look?

"Just as usual, ma'am."

"If I could send him up a cup of tea and a rasher of bacon," continued Mrs. Skelton, seeming distressed, "but I dare not; he would leave the house at once—poor dear young gentleman!"

"Law, ma'am," said Ann, whose feelings were not quite so tender, "I dare say he is used to it."

And perhaps he was; and there is no doubt, Ann, that you are right, and that habit does a great deal; however, habit or not, Mr. Owen had certainly tasted nothing that day beyond bread purchased the night before, and a cup of cold water. But this was not the hardest side of his lot. Enough pity has been wasted on the hunger and thirst of genius perishing for want in a garret; keep a little for genius vainly revolting against obscurity, vainly striving for the

broad daylight and free air of fame. Ambition may not be a virtue, but it is the spur that urges a noble steed to a glorious goal; its disappointments are felt with a keenness proportionate to the greatness of its aim; it has keener pangs than those of hunger, a thirst more wasting than that which human drink can sate.

He sat reading, as we said, vainly studying a profession that had never yet given him his daily bread. At length daylight failed; he rose and paced up and down his narrow room that imprisoned a spirit as restless as that of any wild creature of the woods; then, suddenly pausing near the window, he threw it open. Before him rose brick walls, red with the flush of dying day: above roofs and tall chimneys spread a blue sky, dimmed with London smoke. A sudden vision passed athwart his mind or his heart,—for is it not with the heart we remember a loved spot? He saw a wild Welsh dell, the warm sunlight gliding down the green mountain side; above, a breezy

blue sky, below a rushing torrent white with foam; and by the torrent, vainly dreaming, a boy, in whose heart already burned the pride and ambition of man. Brief was the vision; from one of the neighbouring courts rose the voice of London children at play. They sang a monotonous chaunt, yet it had a strange charm for them; day after day, hour after hour, Mr. Owen had heard them sing that endless song. It had but one word, ever repeated—"Money, money, money."

Money was the song, and money was the burden.

"The very children know it," thought Mr. Owen, as after listening he closed the window. "'Tis not genius, though splendid; 'tis not character, though strong; 'tis not virtue, though immaculate, rule this world. Money is her God, her lord, and her master. Patience, truly, patience!"

To divert thoughts too bitter, he took up an

old newspaper which he knew by heart, yet not all, for looking over it again his eyes fell on a paragraph unread before. It was copied from the "Morning Post," and headed "Interesting Discovery." It related at length with some embellishments, and plenty of flattery, Miss Lee's visit to the Female Asylum.

"Oh, money! money! thou dost indeed rule the world," thought John Owen, laying down the paper with involuntary bitterness. "'Lovely and munificent!'" I remember her a plain, sallow girl, who never could be handsome; and what is a thousand pounds to her wealth, if report speaks true? A drop of water from the deep sea; a grain of sand from the wide shore. Well, may the very children catch up the cry, well may they too, sing, "Money, money!"

"Owen, my good fellow, what the devil makes you lodge so high?" said a drawling voice; Mr. Owen turned round abruptly: the door had opened, and an unannounced visitor had uncere-

moniously entered the room, his sole apartment. He was a man of middle-sized stature, short-sighted, pale, effeminate looking. He spoke in a soft small voice, looking over his right shoulder in a vague languid way, his left arm and hand resting on his hip. His attire was peculiar; his fingers glittered with rings; costly lace ruffles veiled his hands, and a delicate cambric handkerchief emerged from the open breast of a black velvet tunic, fastened at the waist by a solitary button. He had scarcely entered the room, when he sank on a chair, and fanned himself with his handkerchief, like one exhausted by the effort of coming up so high. Mr. Owen looked at him coldly and sternly: this seemed no welcome guest.

"I thought, Captain Glawdon," he said abruptly, "that when we last parted it was understood we need not meet in a hurry."

"Pooh! pooh! Owen, what a rancorous fellow you are," replied Captain Glawdon, taking out a

cigar and lighting it coolly ; “ pshaw, man, you needn’t be so savage, just because you unconsciously gave me some good legal advice. I have hunted you out for the express purpose of getting a stronger dose ; but first let me fulfil a fair, or to speak more correctly, a dark lady’s commands. I am bearer of her grateful thanks to you.”

“ Of what lady do you speak ? ”

“ Of a lady who does you the honour to take an interest in you : Miss Lee—Miss Grace Lee.”

Mr. Owen looked surprised, but he did not reply.

“ Miss Lee,” resumed Captain Glawdon, “ who, feeling indebted to you for the presence of a beloved sister, wishes to express personally her deep sense of the obligation.”

“ Captain Glawdon you are a sphinx.”

“ And you are no *Œdipus*. Well, well—we all have our gifts : my plain meaning is this,—you told me where old Miss Blount resided ; I at once told it to Miss Lee, who immediately wrote off to

her sister, who promptly fled to her, leaving her old cousin in the lurch. And is not all this owing to you?"

"Miss Lee owes me no thanks," coldly replied Owen; "if I have obliged her I did not mean it: I will say more,—had I known that to give you Miss Blount's address would induce a young girl to forsake the cousin who reared her,—a woman old and perhaps poor, for a young rich half-sister, you would never have had it from me."

"Well, well," impatiently said Captain Glawdon, "you need not tell her that when you see her, you know."

"And why should I see Miss Lee?" sharply asked Owen;—"to receive thanks to which I have no claim?"

"Oh, but you must see her," insisted Captain Glawdon, taking out his cigar to speak with more freedom; "'tis Miss Lee's wish, and Miss Lee must be obeyed."

The proud and poor Welshman little brooked that word "must."

"I cannot," he answered coldly.

"Pooh! man! say you do not like."

"Well, then, I do not like."

"What—you do not like to be introduced to Miss Lee, the lovely, the wealthy, the admired lady?"

"No," was the impatient reply.

"Pshaw! I promised to take you to her house, in Park Lane, this very evening."

This settled the matter. Mr. Owen peremptorily refused to go.

"Do not be alarmed," said Captain Glawdon sneering, "we will not use force; and now that we have discharged the lady's commands, come we to our own matters. Owen, you did me a good turn without meaning it. I confess I was rather sly then; now I shall be quite candid. Owen, I am in a new mess."

Mr. Owen smiled ironically.

“From my mother I have inherited three tastes,—old lace, old china, old carved wood. Now, in an ancient Warwickshire public-house I have discovered a most precious panel adorning the mantel-piece of the same. I offered a handsome sum; it was refused; in short, I had to purchase the house. I naturally thought I could do as I liked with my own; but the tenant objected. I used force, and thereby hangs a lawsuit. Now just listen to me five minutes; ’tis a most interesting case.”

Thereupon the Captain entered into a full explanation of the matter; Mr. Owen heard him coldly, then gave a vague opinion that meant nothing. In vain the Captain tried to coax and wheedle him into clearer speech—he failed; whatever he felt inwardly, he outwardly put a good face on the matter.

“I see,” he said, “you don’t understand me quite well; we must talk it over together. I am going to Wales after to-morrow to see my

wife and my mother-in-law. Come and spend a week or two there—eh!”

“With pleasure,” replied Mr. Owen, smiling.

“There’s a good fellow,” said Captain Glawdon, who had not expected to succeed so easily.

“Well,” he added, rising, “I am going to call on my future sister-in-law—come with me.”

“What sister-in-law?”

“Ah! true, you are not initiated in those mysteries—you do not know that within a few weeks, perhaps, my brother-in-law, Gerald, marries his cousin—Miss Lee.”

“Ay!—money marries money. Truly I did not know it—a most important fact.”

“And so you will not come—well man, stay in your den if you like, but mind I expect you after to-morrow.”

“Certainly.”

“Good-night.”

“Good-night,” repeated Mr. Owen. “Ay!

good-night, indeed," he thought, listening to the sound of his retreating steps. "When you were a boy at school, Captain Glawdon, you wanted John Owen's brains to work for you; as a man you filched from him the knowledge that was his daily bread, and what you have done once, you insolently hope to do again; but truly you shall find this time that you are the tool, that he is the master."

Miss Lee's large and luxurious drawing-room was brilliantly lit. She had given her usual Thursday dinner; it was over, and the few but select guests were gathered around their hostess. The conversation was gay, brilliant, clever, entertaining. The invites were few, but they were famous. Old Mr. Hanley, the barrister, equally celebrated for his profound legal knowledge and his surly temper; Branden, the witty sarcastic Branden, of European fame; James Stevens, the great artist; the beautiful Mrs. Chesterfield, whose praise or censure gave life or death in

the fashionable world ; Mr. Austin, the famous traveller ; the mighty Joe Woodman, who from the Olympian heights of criticism poured blame or nodded approbation on the luckless world below ; were all present, all agreeable, all charming. And if Miss Lee wished for something nearer and dearer, she surely had it. She sat between her adopted sister, and, so report said, her future husband. And from either side flattery, all the more seducing for coming from loved lips, was poured into her ear. Mr. Gerald Lee, very gentlemanly, very handsome, very courteous, was entertaining her with news of the progress of the philanthropic institutions, of the charitable plans in which both were zealously engaged. Lily Blount intoxicated with her change of position, with the splendour and elegance of her new home, was whispering praise and fondness in the same breath.

Lily Blount was then a fair young girl of twenty, she was more than fair, she was beautiful

strikingly like the portrait of Queen Joanna, by Vinci, in the Doria palace in Rome. She had the same syren sweetness of feature, the same faithless, yet enchanting face. Her blue eyes wandered quick and restless over the room, seeming to search an object of laughter and mockery, yet nothing could be sweeter than their gaze when it met that of another, nothing more winning than her smile.

"What an insincere face that girl has," observed Mrs. Chesterfield to her neighbour, Mr. Hanley. Mr. Hanley took a pinch of snuff and smiled.

"She is very pretty," he said dryly, and all the perfections of a woman, in his opinion at least, were summed up in this eulogy.

"So different from the noble frankness of Miss Lee's countenance," continued Mrs. Chesterfield.

"I wonder whom she expects this evening, she is always looking at the door."

Before Mr. Hanley could reply, the door

opened and Captain Glawdon entered. He quietly made his way to Miss Lee, waited for a pause in the conversation she was then holding with his brother-in-law, then leaning on the back of her chair, he said in low careless tones,

“He would not come.”

“Why so?”

“He is no eagle; he cannot gaze at the sun.”

Miss Lee smiled and resumed her interrupted conversation.

At length the evening wore away, the guests departed one by one. Gerald Lee remained last. He unfolded a broad sheet of paper: the plan of a new home for destitute children. Miss Lee was delighted with it, and praised it warmly; she closed her eulogy with the significant declaration,

“Any assistance I can give you, you may command.”

“Ever generous,” he replied, raising her hand to his lips.

Their eyes met: he smiled, she blushed slightly.

“What a pair of philanthropists,” exclaimed the light mocking voice of Lily. They looked round. She sat in her white muslin dress on a crimson couch, thence gazing at them with mingled mockery and sweetness.

Mr. Gerald Lee reddened, but Grace only laughed and said indulgently,

“Children are privileged, are they not, Mr. Lee?”

“Assuredly,” he replied with a formal bow, and he left.

“And now you are going to scold,” exclaimed Lily, when he was gone; “I know it was very impertinent, but if I was born impertinent how can I help it?” Grace sat down by her and fondly smoothed her luxuriant fair hair.

“What a beautiful hand you have,” said Lily softly, “and what a lovely arm and what an exquisite pearl bracelet!”

"Have it," promptly replied Grace, and at once she unfastened it from her wrist and clasped it on that of Lily, who, to say the truth, showed no reluctance. She held out her hand at arm's length, gazed on it admiringly, then throwing her two arms around the neck of Grace, she said, "Good night, my angel, I know you do not wish me to thank you, and therefore I do not," with which she left her.

Grace looked around her deserted drawing-room; she stood in the centre with her cheek resting on her hand in a musing attitude. "And so he would not come," she thought: "proud heart, he can be humbled yet."

Suddenly she drew back; the door which she had not heard opening, had admitted James Crankey, and before she was aware of his presence, the young man was at her feet.

"Well, Mr. James, what is the matter now?" asked Grace, her first surprise over. "Have you quarrelled with little Annie Hanley, and

are you in the wrong that you kneel and ask me to forgive you? I thought I had provided your holidays with a pleasant companion; have I erred, Mr. James?" And calmly laying her hand, a beautiful one as Lily had truly said, on his burning brow, she looked down with a smile in his flushed face.

"I cannot bear it," he exclaimed, in broken tones, "I have come to tell you—I cannot bear it. You treat me like a boy—you are cruel. I know you are going to marry that rich proud man—I cannot bear it."

"Get up, James," quietly said Miss Lee, "here is Annie wondering what you are doing so long away from her."

James rose as red as fire; with a lowering brow he turned to the door: it was half open, and a curly-headed little girl stood on the threshold looking at them, her eyes wide open with surprise. "Ay," thought James Crankey with a swelling heart, "this is the companion

she gives me; but she shall feel, she shall know yet, I am a man—not a boy.” And without deigning to give Annie Hanley a second look, he left the drawing-room by another door.

“Come in, Annie,” gently said Miss Lee; and sitting down she beckoned the little girl to her. Annie came willingly; Grace took her on her knees, kissed her, then asked how she liked James.

“I don’t like him,” was the frank reply, “he pinches me.”

Grace laughed and caressed her, until Annie, unused to sit up so late, fell asleep in her arms, with her curled brown head resting on the shoulder of Miss Lee, by whom she was consigned to the care of Mademoiselle Dupuis.

Doctor Crankey’s rooms were in the most retired part of Miss Lee’s house. Thither she now bent her steps. She found him studying by lamp-light, like any ancient sage. As she softly

raised the heavy velvet hanging that divided his apartment, and put in her dark head glittering with a narrow gold circlet, he raised from the heavy Saint Jerome open on his lap, a face as rugged, though not quite so grand, as that of the illustrious father; but on seeing Grace he suddenly smiled, like one greeted by a pleasing vision. She sat down on a stool at his feet; he stretched out his hand, and smoothed her hair softly and fondly.

“What have you got there?” said Grace, attempting to raise the heavy quarto and draw it on her lap. “Latin? Ah! I fear I have forgotten my Latin.”

“Yes, you have become a grand lady; and once you were plain Grace Lee. You were happy then.”

“So I am now. I could be happy sitting on a throne as a queen; and happy running along a green hedge as a bare-footed peasant girl. And how goes the History of the Church?”

"I have actually gone as far as the third chapter of the second book."

"Have you really!"

"I am actually dealing with Tertullian."

"And favouring him? I know you like him. Well, he was a fine genius, but more of a Stoic than of a Christian; and surely if he had seen me as I am now, he would have had me stoned and pelted by those veiled virgins for whom he wrote; and yet I cannot help liking him for the fire and grandeur of his nature."

"And what have you been doing with yourself this evening?"

"Nothing wonderful. To-day is Thursday, I had my usual guests. I expected one who came not; I dare say you remember him, that Mr. John Owen, to whom I lent, then gave, my father's law-books."

"Ay, ay, I know him of old."

"Of old, Doctor Crankey?"

"Yes; he was a sort of pet at Hawthorne

House when I was chaplain there, and I taught him mathematics and algebra."

"Was he a good pupil?"

"He was clever enough. Indeed why should I not give him his due? He was by far the cleverest lad I ever met with; his mind was vigorous beyond his years, and his heart hard and ambitious too; but he had at times a look that made me think of Cain and Satan; and I cannot say I ever liked him."

"You do not speak as if you did," said Grace, half smiling. "Cain and Satan,—there is a character for you."

"I only spoke of his look, you saucy girl. He may have improved for all I know."

"Not much, I dare say."

"How is he getting on—is he succeeding?"

"I doubt it."

"If he does not it will not be for want of trying. I remember giving him once a problem to solve, and saying to him as I gave it, 'John

Owen, you cannot do it.' Just as shortly he replied, 'Doctor Crankey, I will do it.' "

"And did he do it?" asked Grace, looking up in the face of the priest.

"He sat at it two days and two nights; he could not eat, he could not sleep, for thinking of it. At length on the third day——"

"He did it," interrupted Grace. "I knew he would."

Doctor Crankey put forth a sarcastic lip. "*He* do it!" he replied. "Was he a Pascal?—was he a Newton? No, and clever lad though he was, mathematics were not in his way."

"What did he do, then?" asked Grace, with some impatience.

"He fell ill of a brain fever, brought on by pure rage and vexation. He had the pride of Lucifer."

Miss Lee put no more questions. She rose and said, "You remember we are going to Wales to-morrow, Doctor Crankey?"

He looked confounded. "I had forgotten all about it," he said, at length. "Why, I want to go to the British Museum to-morrow."

"We shall not stay long in Wales. I want to go, and Lily too."

On hearing the young girl's name the priest frowned: he was tenacious of old dislikes; he was going to speak; but Grace quickly laid her hand on his lips.

"She is young," she said, hastily, "and flighty. I know she annoyed you the other day, by upsetting your inkstand; but she did not mean it."

"Did she not, though!" growled Doctor Crankey. "A little Judas! I always said it, Grace. Grace, Grace, you will repent your foolish fondness for that girl."

But Grace only smiled.

CHAPTER VI.



THE sun was descending all gold behind the dark mountain ridge ; the opposite hills of barren rock were now purple and azure ; the torrent rushed green and foaming in the narrow dell below ; above spread the heavens of eternal blue ; and by the torrent lay the restless—ambitious man, whose dreams that wild Welsh dell had haunted.

He lay 'midst the yellow gorse in bloom ; he felt on his feverish brow the fresh mountain breeze ; his ear drank in with delight the roaring of the waters. "Oh! Wales," he thought, "there is no land like you ; no mountains, no lakes, no rivers, no torrents are like yours, my country !"

and heedless of the declining sun, regardless of the hour, he sank into a waking dream,—that sweet torpor of the senses, more delightful than entire slumber, in which our mother Nature loves to wrap us, her vexed and wearied children.

His reverie was abruptly broken by a silent and sudden apparition on the opposite bank. His eye had wandered there a minute before and had seen nothing, save the barren and pathless rocks that overhung the green waters; and now a lady, young and richly dressed, sat calmly on a granite fragment washed by the rushing torrent. The rocks rose dark and high behind and around her; there was light in the sky above, but it entered not this sombre and sunless spot. With her robe of rich changing silk, her gold *châtelaine* glittering in its shining folds, and a gemmed bracelet clasping her arm, half veiled by her sleeve of lace, the lady's figure looked as bright and as warm as a gleam of sunshine in some cool and shady grotto. Who was she how had she

come there? He looked around and could see no path and no issue; he looked at her, her head was bare; the dark curls which clustered around her neck did not seem to have been even stirred by the mountain breeze; her silk robe had not a stain of dew; her small sandalled feet looked as if they had trod on the softest carpets to reach this rugged spot.

Mr. Owen smiled to himself and remembered old Welsh legends of fair ladies spirited away to the mountains, where they sometimes suddenly and silently appeared to solitary wanderers like him, and again as suddenly vanished. Unseen himself, he looked at her curiously. She sat very still, with her hands clasped on her lap, in an attitude that was not without grace; yet fair or lovely she was not, her complexion was too dark, her features were too irregular for beauty.

“I have seen her before,” thought Mr. Owen; “where, I wonder?”

Again he looked at her; she had risen; she

had gone to a spot lower down, where the torrent flowed less fiercely; there, kneeling down on the dark rocks, she stooped until her face almost seemed to touch the wave; eight times she dipped her hand in the flowing stream, eight times she raised it to her lips and drank.

“She is Welsh, and she has been eight years away,” thought Mr. Owen, suddenly remembering the legend of the place. There, in the heroic age of Wales, had perished one of her chieftains; and, for some unexplained reason, every son and daughter of the land, who visited the place after more than one year’s absence, was bound to drink of the waters of the torrent as many times as he or she had been years away; or, failing in this, to encounter strange misfortunes and deep woe. Curious to see more nearly this faithful observer of her country’s rites and ancient traditions, Mr. Owen rose and walked down the torrent until he came to the spot opposite that where she still knelt. There he, too, bent over

the stream, and, taking up water in his hand, he drank several times.

The lady seemed more surprised than startled at his sudden appearance. She looked at him in that free, fearless way in which children look at strangers. She watched his movements curiously; then suddenly, as after drinking the last time, he seemed on the point of turning away, she said rather eagerly :

“ You had better drink another time, Mr. Owen, or else, you know the story, Ap Rhydon will be fatal to you.”

“ You know me,” exclaimed Mr. Owen, taken by surprise, “ why, who are you ? ”

“ Guess,” was the reply, as prompt as the question.

But instead of guessing, Mr. Owen, rather vexed at having betrayed so much astonishment, looked at her keenly and fixedly.

She sat below the roar and foam of the torrent where it flowed still and deep, but the waters,

though smooth, were broad, and plank, or bridge, or means to cross there was none. Thus secure from intrusion the lady bore Mr. Owen's look with much composure, and returned it somewhat mockingly.

"You cannot guess," she said again, "well time will tell you. I am one of the guests of the house where you arrived this morning; and this evening, unless you are late, we shall sit at the same dinner table."

"Thank you," said Mr. Owen smiling, "I know you now—you are Lady Emma Meredith's companion."

"How do you know?" quickly asked the lady.

"Very easily, there are nine ladies in the house; Mrs. Gerald Lee and Mrs. Glawdon, whom I have seen; Mrs. Rashleigh, whom I know of old; Mrs. Lloyd and the three Misses Lloyd, who are all red-haired; Lady Emma Meredith and her companion. Lady Emma is fifty at least, you are evidently the companion."

“Shrewd conclusion. Well I confess I have not been long in my new situation; can you, Mr. Owen, give me an insight into its duties and obligations.”

“Have you ever been a companion before?”

“Never.”

“Do you wish for the truth?”

“Certainly! for the whole truth.”

“Well then, my young countrywoman—”

“How do you know I am Welsh?” she interrupted.

“By your speech—besides I saw you drinking eight times the waters of the Ap Rhydon.”

“And you six, Mr. Owen, though you have been seven years away. I told you ill luck would befall you; well, well, it will be your own fault—and now pray go on.”

“Prepare for a hard life,” he resumed. “Lady Emma is a charming lady, but she is a great and a rich lady, and every one knows what that means.”

“What does it mean?”

"Truly you have not been a companion long or you would not ask. It means caprice and selfishness."

"A pleasant prospect," said the lady in a piqued tone.

"You asked for the truth. Well here are your duties. To take out Lady Emma's pet King Charles three times a day for an airing. To read to Lady Emma until you are faint, then to be scolded for being nervous. To spend every evening in playing cards, but never on any account to win."

"Excuse me; a poor companion cannot afford to lose."

Win then at your peril."

"Truly, sir, you draw a hard picture. Pray what else?"

"What else! why everything else. You are young, but you must have none of the instinct of youth. Talking, laughing, pleasure are not meant for you."

“And dancing?”

“Dancing! Have you lost your senses? Why you must play a whole evening whilst others dance, but you must never dance. Nor must you sing; if you have accomplishments, hide them as so many sins. They are worse than sins in you, they are an absurd presumption.”

“Then I suppose I must not dress too fine.”

“Be certain of it: let a plain brown gown, something very neat, but excessively simple, be your invariable attire. One last lesson: be civil to all, from the footman to the lady, yet never think yourself sure of an hour’s peace or goodwill.”

The lady heard him with her head bent and her cheek on her hand. When he ceased she looked and smiled rather wistfully; and even across the torrent he could see that her eyes were soft and dark, and that her smile was very sweet. Then rising, she said:

“You have drawn a dismal picture, Mr. Owen;

but I am young, God is good to the young, and spite all you have said I will hope in pleasant, sunshiny days. And now, adieu, take my advice; drink once more of the Ap Rhydon, or woe will befall you." She lightly ascended one rock and disappeared behind another; Mr. Owen smiled to himself rather curiously.

"Ay, go, Miss Lee," he thought, "if you remember me, I too remember you: and for once at least you have heard the truth; for once you have been told in plain speech you are a woman like another."

The last golden glow had faded from the narrow valley; the rising wind moaned amongst the mountains, light mists floated across their rocky summits, and gloom filled the depths of this wild gorge. Slowly and reluctantly Mr. Owen left that spot. Its dreary aspect was pleasanter to his eye than the fairest face; no voice was so sweet to his ear as its wild murmurs; athirst after seven years he now drank deep of nature and solitude. At

length he rose ; he took a lonely path amongst the mountains ; he followed it, passing through thickly wooded defiles, through wilder valleys, until a sudden turning brought him to the open sea, now retreating with the evening tide from the cliff-girt shore.

In all Wales there was no spot more beautiful, more romantic than this. It lay a small green plain, bounded on one side by the boundless sea, on the other by a long background of verdant mountains. The sun which Mr. Owen had seen declining behind them, only now set in the dark blue waves, a ball of fire. A purple and yellow glow encircled the broad horizon—above spread the sky serenely pure. On the slope of the nearest mountain rose a white house ; it had belonged to the late Miss Grace Lee, in it now dwelt Gerald Lee's mother. It was built Italian fashion, with a loggia, or open and arched gallery in front, to which on either side led a broad stone staircase. As Mr. Owen slowly ascended the steps, he saw a

group of ladies standing in the central and widest arch, and thence looking at the broad sea and setting sun. Amongst them he at once recognised Miss Lee. She had changed her attire for one of still greater richness and elegance, and she stood with her elbow leaning on the white stone balustrade, graceful and still as any lady of the olden time.

“Well, Mr. Owen, how do you like our mountains?” patronisingly asked Mrs. Gerald Lee, a large and stately lady.

“Like one who was born amongst them,” was his somewhat cold reply.

At once Mrs. Gerald Lee became distant. She was a most patriotic lady. “Our mountains—our noble mountains” were ever on her lips; but even as some painters use mountains for the background of their picture, so Mrs. Gerald Lee loved best the blue hills of her native land from her London drawing-room. To everything Welsh she had an unfortunate abhorrence she scarcely knew

how to disguise. Most opposed to her in this respect was her sister-in-law, Lady Emma Meredith. She was a slender, pale, nervous, touchy woman, who out of her very touchiness, and from an innate suspicion that her country and its peculiarities were in every one's thoughts, forestalled the expected attack by running down Wales and the Welsh. But woe to the credulous wight who, trusting to Lady Emma's pale meek face and sleepy eyes, ventured to imitate her example; Lady Emma heard him out, then turned round as treacherous and spiteful as a cat. Concerning Mr. Owen she now had her suspicions, and insinuatingly observed: "To one who has seen the mountains of Switzerland, Wales may well seem a molehill."

To this dubious and general remark Miss Lee undertook to reply.

"I did not expect such an unpatriotic sentiment from Lady Emma Meredith."

"Oh! you know me," suavely rejoined Lady

Emma, "I love my country, but I am a cosmopolite. But, my dear Miss Lee, are you not rather chill."

"Not in the least, thank you."

"My dearest creature, I assure you there is a strong draught; do, I entreat you, do leave this dangerous spot."

Everybody present joined in the entreaty; Miss Lee declined, laughing. Mr. Owen bowed to Mrs. Lee and passed on. Grace looked after him silently. He had given her no token of recognition; he had shown no surprise on discovering that she was Miss Lee and not Lady Emma Meredith's companion; Grace was quick to guess the truth: "He knew me all along," she thought.

"Who is that dark ugly man?" asked Lily.

"Mr. Owen."

"And who is Mr. Owen?"

No one replied; but Mrs. Rashleigh whispered to the three red-haired Misses Lloyd in succession.

"Shocking," said Anna.

“Dreadful!” exclaimed Mary.

But Mary Anna looked unable to speak. Mrs. Gerald Lee winced a little. She had a strong suspicion that her flighty son-in-law had introduced some low-born person into this aristocratic company.

The dinner was long and rather dull. Lady Emma Meredith, who had deluded a certain Scotch Major Muir with her usual arts, then, according to her custom, suddenly turning upon him, somewhat enlivened one end of the table; at the other end sat Rashleigh Rashleigh talking to the three Misses Lloyd, in order to be heard by Miss Lee. He was then a tall, slender, smooth man of twenty-eight, plausible in aspect and in speech, with a false look and falser smile, with two voices, one real, arrogant, and full; the other soft and pedantically clear; the voice of one who is preaching, or reading, or lecturing, who speaks not because he has something to say, but because he wants to be heard.

“So he too wants the golden prize,” thought John Owen, seeing how sedulously he sought to catch Miss Lee’s attention; “Ay let him try, she is not for him.”

Grace sat opposite him between Gerald Lee and Captain Glawdon; to her as to their natural centre verged the looks, the smiles, the speeches, of all present. Mr. Owen saw how she breathed in this atmosphere of flattery as in her native element, and he smiled with pity for the flattered, with scorn for the flatterers.

At length the dinner was over. The ladies rose and left the gentlemen to their wine. Lily, like the rest, was ascending the drawing-room staircase when the voice of Grace whispered in her ear—“Follow me,” and looking round she saw her half-sister going down the flight of stone steps that led into the garden.

CHAPTER VII.

THE moon hung in the blue east yellow and full, and looking down above the brow of the mountains lit with a pale and gentle ray the flowery garden. Perfumes wild and sweet came and departed with every breeze. Grace left the gravel paths for the green grass that enclosed the gay parterres ; her elastic footsteps sank noiselessly on the soft turf, and she glided along as swift and as light as a vision of the night. Lily followed more slowly, shivering slightly under the chill breath of the night-air which only freshened the more quick and ardent blood of Grace Lee.

Miss Blount was going, however, to utter a

prudent remonstrance on the folly of thus risking a cold for the gratification of a whim, when the hand of Grace was suddenly laid on her lips. Lily looked round ; two dark forms stood on the plot near them, and the scent of cigars came borne by the breeze more distinct than odoriferous.

“ Who is it ? ” whispered Lily.

Before Grace could reply, the drawling voice of Captain Glawdon observed :

“ So you do not admire Miss Lee, Owen ? ”

“ No,” was the brief and carelessly uttered reply.

“ Good,” muttered Grace in a piqued tone ;
“ what else ? ”

“ She is a fine girl, though,” patronisingly observed the Captain without taking out his cigar.

“ Showy ; ” calmly answered John Owen, also smoking.

“ She is very much admired, Mr. Owen.”

“ She is very rich, Captain Glawdon.”

“And her wealth does not lessen her charms : granted ; nevertheless I maintain that my future sister-in-law Grace is a fine girl.”

John Owen did not seem to consider a reply necessary, and remained silent.

“Now frankly and candidly,” resumed the Captain, who seemed determined to make him speak, “what do you think of Miss Lee?”

John Owen answered the appeal with the impatience of one whom the subject did not interest.

“Really,” he said, “what opinion can I give of a lady of whom I know nothing. She may be handsome ; all I can say is I did not see it. She may be witty, clever, accomplished ; I saw nothing in her beyond the free and confident manner of a girl who knows that let her say or do what she chooses a slavish world will praise and admire her still.”

The Captain laughed languidly, and in the impertinent drawling tone habitual to him, observed :

“You are too severe, John Owen, on my word, you are. Grace is a good girl, a little vain, especially of her hand and arm.”

“Which are both very handsome. I noticed them at dinner.”

The Captain had drunk enough to be insolent. Besides, for the last two days, he had amassed a secret store of irritation against John Owen, from whom he had been unable to extract the least particle of valuable information in the legal way.

“My dear fellow,” he said, mildly, “it will be wiser not to mind either the hand or arm of Miss Lee. I warn you that she is the golden fruit of which I am dragon.”

“Then I suppose it would be positively dangerous to discover that she has very fine eyes, good teeth, &c.”

“It would not be advisable,” suavely replied Captain Glawdon.

“She is no goddess,” answered John Owen,

with a laugh of disdain, "but a woman like another."

"Not exactly like another—not exactly, my dear friend," said the Captain, with an increase of gentleness, "for I am dragon, you know."

Mr. Owen turned round, and tapped Captain Glawdon on the shoulder.

"Captain Glawdon," he said, significantly, "the golden fruit no more tempts me than I dread the dragon."

The conversation had reached an uncomfortable crisis: the would-be patron and his rebellious protégé stood eyeing one another silently and askance, when from a neighbouring alley the voice of Rashleigh Rashleigh was heard, calling out with its pedantic distinctness: "Captain Glawdon!"

Grace did not wait for the issue of this newcomer's intervention. She abruptly turned away; in a few minutes she had re-entered the house with Lily. From the dining-room, not yet

forsaken, came the loud sounds of talking and laughing. Miss Lee passed on, pushed open the door of a lonely and elegant sitting-room, redolent with the perfumes of flowers, and lit by a solitary lamp that burned with a mild ray reflected in a vast and gloomy mirror.

“Eaves-droppers hear no good of themselves,” said Grace, closing the door. “Eh! Lily?”

She laughed; then throwing herself in a deep arm-chair, and fanning herself with her handkerchief, she exclaimed, impatiently, “Is it not desperately hot?” Before the young girl could reply, she started up and paced the room with hasty steps.

“Mr. Owen is as rude as he is ugly!” indignantly cried Lily; “*et ce n'est pas peu dire!*” she added in French.

Grace smiled and looked over her shoulder at the mirror she was then passing, and from its depths her dark expressive face smiled back at her—a smile of mingled scorn and sweetness.

“He said I was plain,” she exclaimed gaily; “well, let him; his looks never told me he thought me lovely; better his scorn than the flattery of others. Besides!” she added, throwing back her head with not ungraceful disdain, “hath not the poor handmaiden actually found favour in the eyes of my Lord Sultan; has he not condescended to perceive that we are not wholly destitute of those charms that win us favour in the eyes of our masters. May we not rejoice in the possession of a hand, ay, even of an arm. Nay, our eyes have positively some lustre, and our teeth—hear and admire! are not displeasing in the sight of his lordship, who, moreover, has kindly added an &c. as polite as it is comprehensive!”

She laughed, a laugh that spite of its irony was, like her speech spite of its sting, sweet and clear. But she was not allowed to indulge long in these reflections: the door opened, and Mrs. Gerald Lee herself entered. Her daughter, a

gentle young woman, Captain Glawdon's wife, Lady Emma Meredith, the three Misses Lloyd, followed. All alarmed and distressed at Miss Lee's absence had come to seek her. And Miss Lee graciously yielding to their entreaties, consented to honour the drawing-room with her presence. The gentlemen were already above. At once Captain Glawdon went up to Grace.

"Where can you have been all this time?" he languidly asked, dusting with his delicate cambric handkerchief a speck from his velvet tunic, and gently shaking his lace ruffles, so that they fell gracefully over his white hands, "you have been sought for everywhere, up and down, in the house, in——"

"But not where I was," interrupted Grace.

"And where then were you? In a rose or in a lily?"

"Guess."

Before the Captain could obey and solve this delicate riddle, he was imperatively summoned

back to a card-table, which he had deserted on Miss Lee's entrance. Grace, turning to Lily who sat on the couch by her, said with a scornful smile :—

“The dragon is no lynx, eh ! Lily ?”

The young girl laughingly pinched her arm.

Grace half turned round and saw John Owen, who sat on the chair next to the couch, partly concealed by the heavy window-curtain. He was bending towards her with something bright in his hand; his eyes had a keen look, and a smile parted his lips. Grace feeling betrayed by her last words, coloured a little, but her look met his steadily.

“I believe this belongs to you,” he said, handing her a bracelet of Arab coins which she had worn at dinner, and had not missed from her right arm.

“Yes, it is mine—thank you,” she replied, taking it from him with a cool bend of the head. “Where did you find it ?” she added, a little abruptly.

"I picked it up from the steps leading to the garden, where Captain Glawdon and I had gone to smoke a cigar after dinner."

"And where Lily and I had gone to breathe a little fresh air."

He looked at her and she looked at him. And there was pride, and more than pride, perhaps, in either gaze.

"Did you take another drink of the Ap Rhydon?" asked Miss Lee.

"No," he replied with a smile.

"You disbelieve the prophecy?"

"I have a firm faith in every old legend."

"Then why not obey it?"

He smiled again without replying. He showed no wish to continue the conversation. Grace betrayed neither pique nor displeasure. Her dark eyes rested for a moment on John Owen, then she smiled rather graciously, like a queen on a subject.

"And so that was Miss Lee's bracelet which

you found,—lucky fellow!” observed Captain Glawdon, who stood again by them. His tone caused the dark face of Mr. Owen to darken, and his look made the warm cheek of Grace flush warmer.

“Is that coffee the servant is carrying on a tray?” asked Miss Lee.

The movements of Captain Glawdon were never prompt, and whilst he was indolently looking through his eye-glass for the servant and tray, Mr. Owen had quietly handed Grace a cup of coffee. This, too, the Captain chose to comment upon by another look, which Grace, however, returned so haughtily that he thought it advisable to turn away, and saunter back to the card-table; but, unable to forget his precious Hesperides even there, he managed to shift his chair so as to command a side view of the couch. They were talking. What would not Captain Glawdon have given to know the subject of their discourse, or rather that something more than

the subject—the tone, the manner—things in themselves so slight, yet that indicate so much. Vain hope! All he could see was that Grace Lee looked proud, and often smiled;—of Mr. Owen he could make nothing. And this, to his annoyance, lasted the whole evening. At length the guests rose and dispersed.

“Captain Glawdon,” sententiously observed Mrs. Lee when she found herself again alone with her son-in-law, “may I ask who is that very extraordinary person, a Mr. Owen I think, a Welshman, with whom Miss Lee was so taken up the whole evening?”

“A poor devil in the law who has been previously useful to me, my dear madam.”

“And is that a reason for bringing him to this house?” asked Mrs. Lee with dignified reproach, “is that a reason for—” she paused; she was speaking to vacant walls. Captain Glawdon had vanished.

Miss Lee was sitting in her adopted sister’s

room, and Lily was entertaining her with comments more pungent than charitable on every one in the house. She began with Mrs. Gerald Lee and closed with John Owen.

“I never saw such a bear as he is, nor such an angel as you are, Grace.”

“And why am I an angel?” asked Miss Lee, half raising her head from the depths of the arm-chair in which she sat.

“Why he is as bitter as gall to you, and you—you are as sweet as honey to him.” Grace laughed.

“’Tis his temper to be bitter,” she said; “and mine to be sweet. Let him—if he is bitter he is true, and what is there beyond truth in this world? Besides,” she added, smiling, “if he does not like me, how can he help it? Well, good-night, Lily, God bless you! I must go and see Doctor Crankey.”

Miss Lee, like an ancient Roman, had travelled with all her household gods; but the chief of them, her old guardian, had made his

conditions before moving. He insisted on a shrine of his own, and refused to consort with the other Lares: to speak more plainly, Doctor Crankey had accompanied Miss Lee to Wales on the clear understanding that he was to sleep, eat, and study in his own rooms, and never to be expected to appear in the drawing-room, or to mingle with Mrs. Gerald Lee's guests. To his apartment, Miss Lee who never allowed a day to pass without spending part of it with him, now proceeded.

Doctor Crankey received her with a placid smile; Grace sat down at his feet; he quietly smoothed her dark hair. She was the first to speak.

"Doctor Crankey," she said, suddenly looking up in his face, "why did you never teach me algebra as well as Greek and Latin?"

"And what good would algebra have done you?" asked the priest with raised eyebrows.

"What good does it do anyone? What

good did it do that John Owen of whom you were speaking the other day ? ”

“ None in the world, I dare say ; but it was his whim to learn, and mine to teach.”

“ I am sure he was a disagreeable pupil.”

“ He was not amiable.”

“ Insolent ? ”

“ No ; not at all ; but there was something unpleasant about him ; that is very certain.”

“ He was quarrelsome, vindictive.”

“ There you are mistaken,” interrupted Doctor Crankey, who would not have belied the Evil One himself, “ he was not at all quick to take offence. Indeed, I never knew the lad to have more than one quarrel, and then young Hawthorne, an insolent little fool, was to blame. After bearing with him until I thought he must be very patient or very mean, John one day quietly turns round and knocks him down.”

“ He must have been in a nice passion.”

“ No ; he was quite cool, and picked up Haw-

thorne, explaining to him that he did not like fighting, but that as he, Hawthorne, wanted a lesson, he had been compelled to give him one: a piece of reasoning that exasperated the other even more than the blow."

"How old was he then?"

"Fifteen or so."

"A good beginning," drily replied Miss Lee; but she did not tell the old man that Mr. Owen was in the house. She sat at his feet, her arms folded, her head bent, her whole attitude expressive of deep thought. Regardless of this, Doctor Crankey entertained her with the account he proposed to give in his History of the Church, of the blessed Saint Jerome.

"He disliked women, did he not?" suddenly asked Grace, looking up.

"Nay, child; have you forgotten his long and faithful friendship with Saint Paula, with her daughter Eustochium, with that devout widow—"

Grace laughed.

“You are talking of Saint Jerome,” she said, “and I am talking of Mr. Owen.”

“Then you might choose a better subject,” impatiently replied the priest, “and what do I know whether a surly boy liked or did not like your foolish sex? You are dreaming, child, you have sat up too late; go and sleep, go and sleep.”

Grace was too much accustomed to the ups and downs of Doctor Crankey's temper to trouble herself with this pettish outburst; but she did not pursue a subject evidently distasteful. She looked at him awhile smiling, then she rose and went up to the window. Doctor Crankey's rooms were on the ground-floor, and the window by which Grace stood opened on the garden and overlooked the sea. Shrouded in by the heavy curtain which she had raised, then allowed to fall behind her, Grace looked out on the dark night. She saw the sombre outline of dark tall trees, the

black vast mountains, the paler sky, which the travelling moon had not long forsaken ; she heard the whistling of the wind, the rushing voice of mountain torrents, the deep, sullen surge of the sea, and a voice sweet, powerful, irresistible, seemed to call her forth. She noiselessly opened the window and glided out. She was at the end of the garden when Doctor Crankey missed her. Though he found the window open, it did not occur to him that she had gone out into the garden ; there was another door to his rooms than that by which she had entered : through that he concluded Miss Lee had passed, and closing the window he thought no more of the matter.

The gayest, the most genial temper can have the keenest enjoyment of solitude. To Miss Lee, surrounded as she was the whole day with flattery and flatterers, it became at times a want, a thirst to be satisfied and sated no matter how.

On reaching the end of the garden she paused, not merely because of the natural barrier, but

because she found there all she sought. It was bounded by a low wall, built on the very edge of the sea-washed cliff; beyond it spread the ocean, illimitable and gloomy as the night that hung over it. The evening was not chill, but its mildness was just freshened by the sea-breeze. Miss Lee sat down on a stone bench; she laid and rested her head on the ivy-grown wall; below her spread the vastness of the sea, above her the darkness of the sky, and between both, vaguely seen, a long line of shore — a boundless horizon.

“Oh! this too is happiness,” she thought; “this too is delightful! World, thou art sweet; Nature, thou art sweeter.” And her heart throbbed with delight, and happy tears filled her eyes. With a start she looked up. She had heard a step approach; she now saw a dark form draw near, then suddenly pause, and sit on the wall against which she leaned. Something in the height, in the gait, at once made her

recognise John Owen. He, too, had come there to refresh his spirit with the peace and silence of the night; but he neither saw her nor was he conscious of her presence. Miss Lee, not wishing to appear or be seen, remained very still, in the hope he would go first; but Mr. Owen showed no inclination to move from the spot, where he sat with folded arms and looks bent on the sea. Grace waited; then losing patience, she rose and said quietly:

“Good-night.”

He moved slightly; but before he could reply, the languid voice of Captain Glawdon was heard observing, from an alley close by:

“Good-night! and what spirit says good-night at this hour?”

“Would you have it say good-night in the morning?”

“Humph!”

“Or do you, perhaps, object to the wanderings of spirits?”

“Not in the least, if I only knew what spirit I am addressing.”

“It answers to the name of Grace Lee.”

“And may I ask what other spirit was honoured with this adieu?”

No one replied; but Captain Glawdon stepping up to where John Owen still sat, for he had not moved, easily recognised him.

“Oh, Mr. Owen!” he exclaimed in a tone that said, “I knew it!”

Captain Glawdon had begun by feigning suspicions he did not feel; he now really felt them. He remembered the wish Grace had shown to see this poor and obscure barrister, the satisfaction she had betrayed when he had said to her, “You will find him in Wales;” and coupling these facts with the strange fancies of women in general, and of great and rich ladies in particular, he now fell into a strange and gross mistake.

“Oh, Mr. Owen!” he said again, “why, I was previously seeking Mr. Owen, and not find-

ing him within the house, I concluded he was without."

"Shrewd. Well, good-night to you, too, Captain Glawdon. My wanderings cease as yours begin."

And before the slow Captain could offer to accompany her, Miss Lee was gone. Her rooms overlooked both the garden and the road that led to the house. She dismissed her maid, extinguished her lamp, and opened the garden window. It was half-an-hour and more before Captain Glawdon and Mr. Owen re-entered the house; almost immediately afterwards she heard the front door opening; she looked out softly and saw Mr. Owen go out, and take the road that led to the neighbouring town of W——. "Good!" thought Grace, smiling to herself, and in a few minutes she was fast asleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE night had been serene, and the next morning rose bright and lovely. The mountain breeze came down in the garden sweet and fragrant; the garden itself was fresh and delighful as the hour; the golden sun filled it with warmth and brightness; cool shadows chequered the avenues; and flowers, fresh as the dew that glittered on their delicate petals and gemmed their green leaves, rose on their stalks straight and beautiful. Waking from their long night slumber, they opened to the morning and filled the air with sweet incense. Doctor Crankey was quietly reading his breviary in the sun, when an arm, passed within his, suddenly roused him. He looked round smiling, but did not speak. Grace,

for of course it was she, quietly closed his book and said decisively :

“ You have done for this morning. I want to take a walk in the mountains, and you are coming with me.”

“ At this hour ? ”

“ Certainly at this hour. Besides, look,” and she pushed open a wooden door by which they stood, “ early as it is, others have been out before us. Come, come, Doctor Crankey, I am in a hurry.”

Doctor Crankey grumbled, and spoke of foolish fancies ; but Grace only laughed, and talked of the beauty of the sky, of the freshness of the morning, of the delightful harmony of breeze, flowing water, and singing birds—all blending sweetly in the solitary places through which she led him. At length they reached a wild valley with rising rocks reddening in the morning sun, and a rushing torrent still in deep shade. The freshness of the hour lingered around the

place, but not its silence or solitude. On a flat, small grassy sward four gentlemen lounged about, smoking and talking. One was Captain Glawdon, who stood leaning in an attitude against the wall of rock behind; in an opposite direction John Owen walked up and down with rapid steps: his arms were folded, his look was downcast, his face was more sallow than ever. "He looks sullen and dangerous," thought Grace; but from him her look quickly wandered to two gentlemen who, a little apart, walked up and down.

"Humph! what have we got there?" said, or rather grumbled, Doctor Crankey.

"They are measuring paces," calmly replied Grace; "one of them is Major Muir; the other, surely I ought to know those blue spectacles and that drooping nose! The other is Doctor Marsh himself, fetched last night from W—— for the praiseworthy purpose. Good morning, Doctor Marsh."

She dropped Doctor Crankey's arm and stepped forward, uttering the salutation in a clear, musical voice. There was a pause resembling dismay among the gentlemen. Doctor Marsh remained aghast in the very act of measuring, his right foot before his left. Major Muir, too deaf to hear, but not too blind to see Grace, hastily dropped his overcoat on something that lay on the grass. Captain Glawdon hemmed, and, throwing away his cigar, stepped forward with a ready smile. John Owen bowed stiffly and impatiently; then resumed his walk, a moment interrupted.

"Have you really patients in the Ap Rhydon?" resumed Miss Lee, still addressing Doctor Marsh.

"Hem!—I—really——" Beyond this the disconcerted Doctor could not go; Grace would, however, have compelled him to some reply or other, had not the Captain interfered.

"Lovely morning!" he drawled forth rather than spoke; "the house felt so oppressive, that

Major Muir and I thought we would just inhale the morning breeze before breakfast."

"You were measuring paces when we came up," quietly said Grace; "was that to inhale the morning breeze?"

"A race," promptly replied Captain Glawdon; "a wager between John Owen and your humble servant. The said John, relying on his mountain breeding, boasted himself yesterday evening to be more swift of the foot than George Glawdon; whereon there issued a friendly discussion and a wager."

"What are the stakes?"

"My ruby ring against a box of carved wood, which, on the score of its being an heir-loom, he never would part with."

"But risks in a wager! Consistent. Well, Captain Glawdon, if Doctor Crankey will stake anything for Mr. Owen, I stand by you. Pray begin; we shall like it above all things."

"So far as I am concerned," composedly

replied Captain Glawdon, "this is unfortunately out of the question. With a fair lady so near, I should assuredly forget myself."

"So that, instead of stimulating, I should impede your exertions. What a pity! I feel I should have liked to see a race—especially between you and Mr. Owen—amazingly."

The Captain coughed and winced. Grace resumed :

"But what an odd place for a race, Captain Glawdon; you have scarcely thirty feet of level ground. Why did you not take the garden rather?"

"Not solitary enough," replied the Captain, giving her a mistrustful look. "We were afraid of disturbing the ladies."

"I fear I shall not prove so considerate. I am selfish enough to interrupt the pastime I cannot share; and since I am not to see the race, why, then, I think I shall stay here and prevent it."

She sat down on a ledge of rock as she spoke.

The Captain bowed.

"I submit," he said, politely; and coming round to where she sat, he offered to escort her home.

Grace did not answer; her look fell on Major Muir and Doctor Marsh, who stood apart conversing in low tones. Then she turned to him and said:

"I suppose they are fixing on some spot more convenient than Ap Rhydon has proved."

"I should not wonder," he coolly replied, again offering her his arm.

"Thank you," said Grace, "I am not going in yet, besides I want to speak to Mr. Owen."

The Captain could not oppose a wish so distinctly stated. He whistled and walked off to Major Muir and Doctor Marsh, whilst Miss Lee, raising her voice, said clearly and distinctly:—
"Mr. Owen."

John Owen, who was still walking up and down

without taking the least share in what passed around him, did not heed the appeal, which Grace was obliged to repeat in a louder key.

“Mr. Owen, I should like to speak to you if you please.”

On hearing his name, he stopped short and raised his head. He looked fixedly at Miss Lee, whilst she uttered her request, then without replying came round to the rock where she sat waiting. By her sat Doctor Crankey, who had very calmly looked on the whole time.

“Mr. Owen,” said Grace looking from him to Doctor Crankey, “have you forgotten an old friend?”

Mr. Owen gave the priest a surprised and attentive look.

“Yes John,” carelessly said Doctor Crankey, “you see your old teacher, and what have you been doing with yourself since I saw you last?”

“I have taken to the bar.”

“The bar, and why the bar? the devil was the

first barrister in my opinion, Eve was his first client, and we pay the costs to this day.”

“I shall treasure up the fact for my history of eminent lawyers—if I should write one. By-the-by, sir, when will your History of the Church be finished?”

“Before yours is begun, I’ll be bound.”

“And so,” here interfered Captain Glawdon, who had sauntered back to where they stood, “and so you will not come home now.”

He spoke to Grace.

“No, thank you,” she carelessly replied, “Ap Rhydon is pleasant in the morning.”

The Captain bowed and walked off with Major Muir. Doctor Marsh remained behind looking foolish; but he kept at a good distance from the group on the rock, and, botanically inclined, searched amongst the stones by the torrent for plants and flowers.

Doctor Crankey looked up at Mr. Owen, and said in his sarcastic fashion:—

“We were talking of the devil. It strikes me John, that he must have been very busy with you this morning. So you were going to fight a duel with that dandy, that coxcomb, that fool who reckons his duels by the rings on his fingers. Well, well, I thought more of an ambitious man like you—and pray,” he abruptly added, “what was the duel to be about?”

He spoke of it as of a play to be acted. Grace smiled mischievously. Mr. Owen looked from her to Doctor Crankey, and said haughtily:—

“You are privileged, sir.”

“Oh! you will not call me out. Truly, John, I am very much obliged to you. Well, Grace, are you coming?” he added, rising.

Miss Lee took his arm, and with a quiet bend of the head to Mr. Owen, she left the spot.

“How did you know all this was to be?” abruptly asked Doctor Crankey.

“I did not know it, I guessed it, and Providence you see sent us in time.”

Doctor Crankey was not a tender-hearted man.

“Well, well,” he said, “if it were not for the sin of the thing, I cannot say that I should understand why Providence interfered in that particular matter, when Providence as we all know, daily allows many a better man than that sullen-faced John Owen, or that pink-eyed Captain Glawdon, to perish miserably. Truly,” he added in his most thoughtful tone, “the ways of Providence are inscrutable,” and the reflection led him into a train of thought which completely caused him to forget the incident of the morning.

Miss Lee said nothing to remind him of it; but as soon as she reached the house, she asked to speak to Gerald Lee. He came at once, kind, courteous, and attentive.

“How well you look this morning,” he said as he sat down by her; and, indeed, her cheek wore a bloom not borrowed from the rose-coloured curtains near which she sat.

"I have had an early walk, thanks to your brother-in-law."

"What has he been doing?" asked Mr. Lee, looking uneasy.

"He has annoyed me."

"That man is a thorn in my side," said Mr. Lee, rising and pacing the room up and down, "he is a gambler, a spendthrift, worse still, a fool. To be ever paying his debts is provoking enough; but it is nothing to the constant dread in which I live that he will do something to disgrace the family with which he is unfortunately connected. What has he been doing?" he again asked, stopping short before her.

"I will tell you in his presence," she replied, smiling. "I do not like him; but I like fair play."

Mr. Lee rang, gave a message to the servant that answered the bell, and in a few minutes Captain Glawdon entered the room picking his teeth.

"De-lighted to see you this morning, Gerald,"

he said, patronisingly extending a fore finger to the man who had five times paid his debts.

Mr. Lee returned the greeting with a gentlemanly and frozen "Good morning," then glanced towards Grace, who addressing him, and looking at Captain Glawdon, quietly though decisively began the attack.

"I have asked, Mr. Lee," she said, "to speak to you in the presence of Captain Glawdon, in order that you may learn from him on what grounds a gentleman, whom I have seen seven times in all, presumes so far as to watch my movements, judge my actions, and finally challenge another gentleman, a guest of this house, a Mr. John Owen, and that because I show that I take an interest in one whom I remember since I was a child, who often visited my father, and whom I know that my father liked."

"A duel!" exclaimed Gerald Lee, turning

sternly on his brother-in-law, who continued to pick his teeth with perfect coolness.

"Yes, truly a duel," answered Grace, "a duel of which I, Grace Lee, was to have been the heroine; a duel which I had to go and prevent at six o'clock this morning."

"Knowing both the spot and the hour," carelessly said the Captain; "singular, to say the least of it."

Grace rose and looked him firmly in the face.

"Captain Glawdon," she said, calmly extending her hand towards him, "you have uttered an untruth and a slander—and you know it."

The Captain bowed with ironical acknowledgment.

"Ladies can say what they please," he began.

His brother-in-law interrupted him.

"Sir," he said severely, "ever since it was my misfortune to be connected with you—you have done all you could to annoy and provoke me. Yet I confess I did not suspect you

would presume to interfere with Miss Lee's freedom. I cannot understand your motives for doing so."

"Because, mon cher beau frère, you are too busy with philanthropic schemes to mind your own business."

"My own business," returned Gerald Lee, reddening. "May I ask you, sir, what business of mine this is?"

"Faith! I thought it touched you pretty closely," bluntly replied the Captain, looking mystified.

Gerald continued.

"Did I ever by word or look hint that I possessed the least right over the feelings or actions of Miss Lee? I profess as a man of honour, I never did," he emphatically added, turning towards Grace.

"I believe you," she replied, warmly; "I believe you." And she held out to him her hand, which he kissed respectfully. Then again

addressing his brother-in-law, who looked both puzzled and discomfited, he said :

“ Captain Glawdon, if you will fight duels and disgrace yourself, do not imagine I shall attempt to prevent you ; but I beg you to understand, once for all, that as I claim no control over Miss Lee, I will not allow you to exert an impertinent interference which both she and the world would naturally interpret as proceeding from me.”

By the close of this speech Captain Glawdon had recovered his coolness.

“ Is that all, Gerald ? ” he asked, smoothing his lace ruffles.

“ Yes, sir,” gravely replied Mr. Lee, “ that is all.”

“ De-lighted to hear it,” said the Captain, turning on his heel. And he walked off humming a tune with the impertinent ease of a man of fashion under Queen Anne.

“ I wonder,” observed Mr. Lee, as the door closed on him, “ I wonder any one can conde-

scend to quarrel with that man. What sort of a person is that Mr. Owen?" he added, turning to Grace.

She stood by him with her eyes fixed on a large window that overlooked the garden.

"You did not observe him yesterday at dinner," she said, without turning round.

"Not at all."

"Well, then, there he stands by that stone vase in the sun."

Mr. Lee raised his eyeglass, then dropped it again.

"A peculiar looking man," he said quietly.
"What is he?"

"A barrister who wants to speak, be heard, and become famous. Who had built his fortress on the sand-foundation of our slippery friend, and who is all the more exasperated that his plans are upset by a fool whom he despises, and that he is obliged to fight for a woman about whom he does not care."

"Does he care for the duel?"

"I cannot tell. I dare say he is too sensible not to feel that there is something rather ridiculous in standing within convenient distance of a man at whom you are to shoot, and who is to shoot at you, but not good or brave enough to despise the voice of the world that stigmatises as a coward every man who declines a challenge."

"Do you think him willing to shun this encounter?"

"He did not seek it, but I do not think he will take a step to avoid it. Manage without him, Mr. Lee. I have a fancy that there are strange turns in his temper."

"Pray have no fear," composedly said Mr. Lee. "I shall manage without him, as you say; Glawdon must give in. I am sick of his folly: consider the matter settled."

"What matter?" said the light voice of Lily, who had opened the door unheard, and now

looked curiously at them both. "Have you already begun philanthropy in Wales?"

Mr. Lee did not condescend to reply to the impertinent question. Grace looked at him deprecatingly; then looked to Lily, and said—"Incorrigible!"

With a laugh the young girl turned away and left them.

"Pray excuse her," observed Miss Lee, addressing Mr. Lee, "she is young—heedless."

"Do not mention it," he interrupted, smiling. "Miss Blount is a spoiled child." And again assuring her that he would arrange everything between Captain Glawdon and Mr. Owen, he left her.

The day was mild yet sunny. Miss Lee spent the best part of it in the garden with Lily. Mr. Rashleigh Rashleigh lounged about the two ladies. To Grace he gave most flattery; to Lily there is no denying that he gave most looks. Grace took all his homage as a matter of

course—Lily his admiring glances with ironical coolness. At length Mr. Rashleigh Rashleigh, feeling, perhaps, that he lost his labour, walked off with himself.

He was scarcely gone, when Lily with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes, exclaimed :

“ I detest Mr. Rashleigh.”

“ Why so ? ” asked Grace, surprised at this outburst.

“ I tell you I detest him. And he shall feel it yet some day.”

She looked very passionate and very pretty. So pretty that Miss Lee with the indulgence which beauty ever wins forgot to chide. And in the meanwhile a step was heard on the gravel path, a shadow fell on the grass, and Mr. Owen with a slight bow had passed on. Without saying a word to Lily, Grace rose ; took another path, and in a few minutes had reached the spot where it met that which Mr. Owen had taken.

He was coming along with downcast eyes and

folded arms when he suddenly saw her before him. She stood under a tall oak tree in its spreading shadow. She wore a simple white muslin dress, and a broad round straw hat, that half shaded her face and dark clustering curls. She looked not unlike one of the brown Tuscan girls of central Italy ; but though the garden was beautiful, though the day was lovely, these were not the *colline amene*, the pleasant hills, the sunny vineyards, the azure sky of the fertile Tuscan garden.

“How very plain she is,” thought Mr. Owen, who, without caring much about women, had a keen sense of beauty, and who had never seen Grace so near in broad daylight.

Perhaps something in his look betrayed his secret thought, for a warm glow gathered over the face of Miss Lee ; yet with a smile she said :

“Mr. Owen, I understand from Mr. Lee that you mean to leave to-day.”

“Now,” he interrupted quietly.

“Well then, before you go, let me beg of you to forgive me the annoyance I have involuntarily caused you to endure in this house.”

It was his turn to smile.

“Captain Glawdon wanted a quarrel with me,” he replied; “forgive me rather that he involved you in that which concerned me alone. He has apologised and retracted; I am satisfied: let nothing in all this trouble and annoy you.”

Grace looked up at him gently and reproachfully. She seemed to ask for a reply less cold, less formal, but nothing in her had the good fortune to please Mr. Owen. He bowed, and passed on.

Miss Lee looked after him a little wistfully, then she smiled to herself, and slowly turned away. Her pride was placed too high for a proud man's slight to move or affect it. All she thought was—“I wonder why that man dislikes me.”

CHAPTER IX.

MR. OWEN thought no more of his two days' adventure in Wales. Again thrown back on the living death of silence and oblivion, he bore his fate with a sullen calmness that was not resignation.

He sat as usual one evening in his solitary room, revolving useless schemes, when Ann knocked at his door, and silently laid a letter on his table.

Mr. Owen received few letters. He curiously raised this to the light. It was a note, small, perfumed, neatly sealed, and directed to John Owen, Esq., in a free though elegant female hand. He broke the seal with some curiosity,

and read the brief contents :—"Miss Lee's compliments, and an invitation to dinner on the Thursday of the following week."

Mr. Owen read the note twice over, unable to understand its drift. He felt conscious that he had not been so amiable or so courteous as to be entitled to any great kindness from Miss Lee. What did she mean—to conquer or humble his stubborn pride? Whatever her intention might be, he resolved to show her that he did not fear her. He sat down, wrote off an answer by which he accepted the invitation, and calmly waited the day.

He began well. Six was Miss Lee's dinner-hour; seven struck as he crossed the threshold of her mansion. It overlooked Hyde Park, and simple and unpretending without, like a Moorish dwelling, it was like it within splendid and luxurious. Beautiful statues and rare flowers adorned either side of the marble staircase that led to magnificent apartments above. The floors

were covered with Turkish carpets of vivid and brilliant hues, and on which the foot fell softly and silently. Through curtains of the lightest and most costly texture the fading light of day penetrated, mild and subdued, or in rooms already darkened, lamps burned brightly ; fair alabaster figures and bronze groups their only guests. At length the footman who glided along this fairy place noiseless as a shadow, opened a wide door ; beyond it extended a splendid drawing-room ; the three or four seconds the servant took to utter his name sufficed to John Owen to seize it in one rapid glance. A lamp suspended from the ceiling shed its brilliant light over a group, in the centre of which stood Miss Lee talking to a little old man half-bent in two ; farther on a beautiful woman reclined on a divan, and laughed and jested with a tall moustachio'd gentleman ; three other gentlemen conversed apart, and two ladies were bent admiringly over a table of exquisite mosaic work.

They all looked up or turned round on his entrance. Miss Lee advanced to meet him, and received him with more politeness than cordiality, more as a stranger than like a friend; then she introduced him to the three ladies and five gentlemen present. It is a good thing to be cool and self-possessed. John Owen showed neither surprise nor pleasure, nor any feeling save that of civil indifference. This supercilious bearing, joined to the fact that he had kept them an hour waiting for their dinner, raised him considerably in the opinion of all present; according to a well-known and easy standard, his importance was accurately measured by his impertinence. That he might be socially speaking no one, was an extravagant fancy that occurred to none. The mere fact that without being intimate with him, Miss Lee had asked him to her pet Thursday dinners, proved the contrary. The only question at issue therefore was, what was Mr. Owen? Miss Lee had simply said that she expected

another guest, but had said no more. The dinner interrupted several speculations which had already begun on the subject.

We will not commit the fame of Miss Lee's Thursday dinners by giving an account of them ; with the indescribable charm of look, tone, and manner wanting, wit spoken might not prove wit written ; and remarks that seemed striking or deep when heard above the jingling of glasses and the hum of frivolous table-talk, might now read flat and dull. Suffice it to assure the reader that the cooking was perfect ; that the wines were exquisite ; that old Mr. Hanley was very bitter and very funny ; Woodman clever and dogmatic ; Brandon brilliant ; Mr. Austin entertaining ; Stevens rather prosy ; Mrs. Chesterfield delightfully amiable ; and Mrs. Brandon and Mrs. Stevens as usual rather quiet ; but, lest he should feel too disappointed, let us also assure him that, after all, nothing wonderfully deep, learned, original, or witty was said the whole evening. John Owen

ate little and drank less, looked indifferent and cool, and, though seated by the beautiful Mrs. Chesterfield, never opened his lips unless now and then to answer some remark addressed to him by Miss Lee.

She devoted, however, the chief portion of her discourse to Mr. Hanley and Mr. Woodman, between whom she sat. Turning to the latter at the close of the meal she said :

“How very amusing Mr. Brandon has been this evening.”

“Very witty,” coldly replied the critic.

He was just then on indifferent terms with Brandon. He had been, as every one knows, the making of Brandon ; he had proclaimed Brandon a genius when the world was still ignorant of his existence. He had sung the praises of Brandon on every string ; he had offered up numberless victims on his altar, and sacrificed daily to this insatiable literary Moloch. Yet, hard fate !—Brandon had turned upon him.

Thus it happened ; the great satirist, seized with a poetic fit, had related to the world the story of a fair young creature, a sort of mortal sylph, and Joe Woodman had plainly told him in print that his sylph was all humbug, and in a friendly way had advised him "to give again to the public one of his keen sarcastic portraitures of human nature." Isaac Brandon took up his pen, and avenged his sylph by giving the public Joe Woodman to the life. *Indè iræ!*

Since then they had been very cool and very civil. Mr. Woodman was wise enough to take what he had got and keep his peace ; but he meditated a signal revenge : no less than the putting down of Brandon and the raising up of some genius in his stead. Geniuses, however, not being very common, he was compelled to protract his kind intentions, and the better to lull the suspicions of Brandon to sleep, he remained on speaking terms with him, and even affected to mention him with an increase of kindness.

"Yes, very witty," he repeated, again addressing Miss Lee: "Brandon is a wit; wit, I will venture to add, is his forte."

"He has a fine phrenological development, however."

"Not wonderful," mildly corrected Mr. Woodman: "large perceptive, small reflective faculties; much smaller, for instance, than that sallow man near him, who has wit quite as large. Splendid head; I wonder where I have seen him?"

He turned to Miss Lee and put in his most careless tones, the question which had been on the tip of his tongue ever since they had sat down to dinner.

"I really know too little of Mr. Owen to be able to enlighten you," quietly replied Grace. "Pray have some of this *ambrosie à la Lee*, as Monsieur Baptiste does me the honour to call it."

"Monsieur Baptiste is a clever man," sen-

tentiously observed the critic; "and so," he added, with adroit negligence, "you have not known him long?"

"I have had him some months."

"Mr. Owen!"

"Mr. Owen! oh! no, Baptiste of course. We are talking of Baptiste, Mr. Hanley," she added, turning to the old barrister; "and of his *ambroisie à la Lee*. What do you say to it? He has acknowledged to me that he awaits your verdict with *un peu d'emotion*."

Mr. Hanley, one of the most genuine gourmands of the age, bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment, and half shutting his eyes to concentrate the powers of sense, he tasted this ambrosial food after the most leisurely fashion. For the information of the curious, we can state that in colour it was green and brown; in substance neither quite solid, nor yet completely liquid—as to its real nature, it was known to heaven and Monsieur Baptiste!

“ Very delicious, indeed,” approvingly observed Mr. Hanley : “ and what is it made of ? ”

“ Monsieur Baptiste ransacked London, then locked himself up for three days in his study. The name of one of the ingredients is, however, known to me ; but I am pledged to the most inviolable secrecy.”

“ Shall I guess ? ”

“ You cannot ; the taste is so thoroughly disguised as to be wholly lost. Mr. Woodman, pray have more ? ”

“ Thank you—he is a political writer, is he not ? ”

“ Who ?—Ah ! you mean Mr. Owen. Heaven knows. Were you speaking, sir ? ”

“ I was giving it as my humble opinion,” shrewdly replied Mr. Hanley, “ that Monsieur Baptiste has made a free use of almonds.”

Grace smiled and shook her head ; the old lawyer looked disappointed ; and Joe Woodman,

who had a critical liking for contradiction, said, drily :

“ Almonds ! Rice, rather.”

“ Rice !” contemptuously muttered Hanley to the beautiful Mrs. Chesterfield, by whom he sat. “ I never thought anything of that man’s judgment.—Rice !”

“ It tastes more like maize,” placidly observed Mr. Stevens, swallowing down a large spoonful.

“ Oh ! ye gods !” ejaculated Hanley, whose eye, in a fine frenzy rolling, lit with impotent wrath on the unconscious and careless artist. “ Maize ! What will come next ; flour ?”

The next guess was by no means a vulgar one. Mr. Austin, the great traveller, gave the name of some Chinese dainty, in thirteen syllables of two letters each ; but Grace still smiled, and shook her head.

“ They know nothing about it,” impatiently said Mr. Hanley, again addressing Mrs. Chester-

field. "Look at that Goth; he has not even tasted his."

The Goth was John Owen, whose ambrosia remained untouched on his plate. Mrs. Chesterfield was more clear-sighted than Joe Woodman; she had her suspicions concerning her neighbour. She had a strong impression that he might be no one; and not being remarkable for caring much about unknown people, she now turned to John Owen, dropped her eyelids, and said, with a smile both gracious and ironical:

"Do not you like ambrosia, Mr. Owen?"

"I never touch oysters, ma'am," he replied, calmly.

"Oysters!" exclaimed Mr. Hanley, to whom the word was a flash of light,—“oysters! how, could I not find it out at once! Wonderful! perfectly wonderful!”

He looked with unfeigned admiration at John Owen, who bore his triumph with great equanimity.

"You have a subtle taste, sir," deferentially said the barrister. "I would give something to possess a palate so delicate in the art of detecting."

"Mine had nothing to do with this; I smelt the oysters, and that was enough," replied Mr. Owen, who did not seem to relish the praise.

Mr. Hanley nearly dipped his nose in his plate, but after smelling awhile, he looked up and shook his head.

"Sir," he said gravely, "your nose is better than mine; I am very fond of oysters, but I never could have guessed there were any in this *ambroisie à la Lee*."

"And I detest them," drily answered Owen, "and hate naturally deceives us less than love."

"A deep remark," sententiously observed Mr. Woodman to Miss Lee; "I trust," he added, lowering his voice, "that Mr. Owen is on our side."

"I know nothing about him or his opinions," gravely replied Grace.

The critic gave her a look of mingled scrutiny and doubt. He had never known Miss Lee to ask any but celebrities to her Thursday dinners : John Owen might be anonymously famous, but surely he had done something to obtain the distinction conferred upon him ! Grace caught his look, and amused at the direction his thoughts persisted in taking, she smiled mysteriously, but eluded all further questioning by rising and thus giving the ladies the signal of retiring. As she left the room, she cast a furtive look at John Owen. He still sat quiet, and apparently indifferent ; but she could detect him keenly watching both Hanley and Woodman, like a wary archer who keeps his aim in view long before he bends his bow.

Mrs. Chesterfield disliked leaving the dining-room for the drawing-room, or, to speak more correctly, the company of men for that of her

own sex. As a general rule she became sulky and ill-tempered. Her first act on the present occasion was to resume exclusive possession of the best divan, and there by shutting her eyes and remaining wholly silent, to recruit for a new fit of amiability. Miss Lee, in the meanwhile, entertained Mrs. Brandon and Mrs. Stevens, both, as the wives of remarkable men generally are, quiet, inoffensive women ; mild reflectors of their husbands' glory, whom the beauty invariably disregarded. She rallied a little when coffee came up, but feeling put out by the length of time her faithless admirers consumed below out of the light of her smiles, she indulged in a little bit of spite ; sipping her coffee with indolent grace, and giving her voice the quiet, careless tones with which she generally despatched any individual so hapless as to have undergone the ban of her displeasure, she said to Miss Lee, " How very quiet your new friend is ? "

" What friend ? " calmly asked Grace.

"Oh! that Mr. . . . Mr. Onion, . . . is not that his name?" she added, opening her blue eyes, and looking as innocent as a dove in a wood.

"Onion?" simply ejaculated Mrs. Brandon.
"What a funny name!"

"Ridiculous," said Mrs. Stevens, giggling,
"Onion!"

"Do not mention him," quietly observed Grace, turning to Mrs. Chesterfield, "I must expose him. Knowing him, spite of all his talent, to be a perfect bear to women, I made him sit next to you with the hope that you could tame him a little; but now I have done with him, and to punish him, I shall tell every one how he has behaved to you, and disgrace him for ever."

Mrs. Chesterfield was a celebrated catcher and tamer of clever male bears. On her successes in this difficult art, even more than on her charms, was based her name as a fascinating beauty. One failure might prove fatal to her fame; she hastened to atone for the error she had com-

mitted, in attempting to ridicule a person in the favour of Miss Lee.

“Surely, my dear,” she exclaimed, raising her graceful head, “you do not think I meant Mr. Owen,” (she suddenly remembered his name), “a very clever, witty man,—whom I never saw before,” she added, to remind Miss Lee that her bear was not, at all events, a famous one. “I was alluding,” she continued, “to the traveller with the Chinese face, who sat between Mrs. Brandon and Mrs. Stevens.”

“And is his name Onion?” asked Mrs. Brandon, of whose mind the word had taken strong hold.

“Really I do not know,” ironically replied Mrs. Chesterfield.

“His name is Austin,” drily said Mrs. Stevens; “a very agreeable man indeed,” she added, turning to Miss Lee; “what an interesting account that was of Sultana Ka-el-Issali.”

Mrs. Chesterfield looked as if she felt disposed

to deliver some piece of impertinence, but was prevented by the sudden entrance of the gentlemen.

Mr. Austin returned to Mrs. Brandon and Mrs. Stevens, by whom he was very graciously received; the husbands of these two ladies shared the attention of Mrs. Chesterfield. John Owen quietly took possession of the only seat free by Miss Lee. Mr. Hanley and Joe Woodman conversed a little apart. The face of the critic expressed insinuating deference; the old man listened to him with his hands behind his back, his head on one side and a sarcastic smile on his face. He had often called the critic Joe Humbug, and was accustomed to mention him familiarly under this appellation; just as Mr. Woodman aptly called him old Reynard. Both names, to say the truth, were not unmerited, but added nothing to the limited degree of friendliness that existed between Mr. Hanley and Mr. Woodman.

On this occasion Reynard proved too much for the other. Mr. Woodman, giving up Miss Lee as hopeless, was endeavouring to find out from Mr. Hanley who and what John Owen was. He could not have applied to one better informed on the subject. Mr. Hanley knew everything about John Owen; his ambition, his struggles, his present position, his desperate efforts to rise above the dull stream of obscurity. He watched him as a Roman citizen watched the gladiator engaged in mortal combat; alike ready to hail his fall or his triumph; impartially indifferent to either.

Two motives, however, prevented him from gratifying the curiosity of Mr. Woodman. The first was a legal habit of reserve he seldom broke through. Miss Lee gave good dinners, what was it to him what guests she asked? The second motive was, that through the careless inquiries of the critic, he read the secret belief that John Owen was some great unknown,

and he could not resist the exquisite delight of leading his critical sagacity on this false scent. The task was easy. Joe Woodman had begun life with a few select ideas, to which he had faithfully adhered ever since, and which the prospect of an empire would not have induced him to change. The first and foremost of these was a boundless faith and confidence in the infallibility of his own judgment. Instead, therefore, of opening his eyes to the truth, he pertinaciously shut them and gave himself up to his deceiver. Mr. Woodman was very fond of an operation he called pumping. With a meek simplicity that ought to have awakened his suspicions, the old barrister allowed him to pump up the following information. Firstly, that John Owen was in the law; secondly, that he wrote for the daily press; thirdly, that some of the most clever things in the "Times" came from his pen, but that this was a profound secret. Having thus converted an obscure

reporter into a second Junius, he modestly declared he knew no more on the subject. Satisfied with the clever manner in which "he had got it all out of him," Mr. Woodman put no more questions, but having, like Frederick the Great, extracted the juice from the orange, he threw away the rind and quietly walked off. No sooner was Mr. Hanley free than he found himself beckoned to by Mrs. Chesterfield. He obeyed; with a directness of attack suitable to her style of conquering beauty, she said at once:

"Who is that Mr. Owen? Brandon and Stevens have been questioning me about him."

"Let them ask Woodman," carelessly replied the old man, taking a perverse pleasure in misleading her too, "he knows all about him." Mrs. Chesterfield was generally on her guard against Mr. Hanley, but for once she allowed herself to be caught. Though still exquisitely beautiful she was no longer in the prime of

youth. She had had time to watch many a star from its rise to its setting, and it was part of her reputation to know every one worth knowing. She rose, looked about, chatted with Brandon, admired a Velasquez with Stevens, laughed at an Eastern story told by Mr. Austin, and quite casually found herself close to Mr. Woodman, who stood magnificently leaning with his back to the marble mantel-piece. Before she could frame a question, he had said in his most careless tones :

“By the way, how long have you known that dark man who sat by you, O——, O——; I don’t remember his name, but he writes for the ‘Times.’”

“Oh! you mean Mr. Owen,” negligently replied Mrs. Chesterfield, feeling a surprise she did not betray, “really how can I tell; one forgets half the people one knows.”

“Clever fellow!” emphatically said Joe Woodman, “pity he does not forsake politics, for

which he is too personal and bitter, for something in the way of Brandon — only a little deeper.”

“And I who called him Mr. Onion,” remorsefully thought Mrs. Chesterfield; “how unkind of Miss Lee to tell me nothing about him.”

“Suppose you give him a hint to that effect,” confidentially continued Woodman. He gave her a knowing glance.

Mrs. Chesterfield coughed and looked doubtful, and said emphatically, “He is very wilful.”

“Try nevertheless,” was the significant answer.

Here Brandon called the attention of Mrs. Chesterfield, and Stevens claimed that of Woodman. The beauty and the critic parted, mutually deceiving and deceived. “I must have met him before,” thought Mrs. Chesterfield; “how odd I cannot remember where.” Here chancing to turn round to give another look to the individual who occupied her thoughts,

she saw him taking leave of Miss Lee, and in the act of departing. Prompt, according to her habit, she deliberately stepped up to him. Ignoring the fact that he was going, she said with her most seductive smile, "Mr. Owen, how is it you and I have never met before?"

Here John caught the uneasy look of Grace, but he did not need the warning. By temper he was always on his guard. He looked fixedly at the beautiful face before him.

"Are you sure, ma'am," he replied composedly, "that you and I have never met before."

"Where then did we meet?" she asked promptly.

"I do not remember," he leisurely replied, after giving her another look. Mrs. Chesterfield rapidly ran over in her mind the names of all the persons at whose houses she might have met him. Seeing her silent, he thought

she had no more to say, and with a formal bow, left her.

“Extraordinary behaviour!” said Mrs. Chesterfield, drawing herself up and looking piqued.

“Pray do not mind him,” observed Grace, laying her hand on the fair lady’s arm. “I told you he was a bear.”

“Let him be as much of a bear as he likes,” thought Mrs. Chesterfield, “I shall tame him.”

In parting from Mr. Owen, Miss Lee had asked him, once for all, to her Thursday dinners, and he availed himself of the invitation. She treated him with a friendliness and courtesy that tended to raise him in the opinion of the other guests. Thanks to her, he was received by Mrs. Chesterfield, flattered by Woodman, and high in the favour of old Mr. Hanley, the man of all who could best assist him. If he derived no actual benefit from these things, the gate was open to him; he stood on the threshold; it

was now his to enter and win. He often saw and met Miss Lee, but never alone. This brilliant star seemed to have attracted him within her sphere, the better to let him feel the immeasurable distance between so poor a man and so great a lady. Yet in her manner to him he could trace nothing like pride, nothing like the insolence of condescension. Ever simple, natural, and free, without exacting it, she commanded respect.

Better than from afar, Mr. Owen now saw what a splendid, what a charmed life was led by Miss Lee. He saw her in her own home, with a court ever around her; he saw her in the world, where she had introduced him, eclipsing beauty, rank, wit; the object of universal homage. He heard her name in every mouth, ever coupled with admiration. The strangest things which she did, and she was too imaginative and too independent not to do strange things now and then, won their meed of praise. Amongst the

many ways by which the briefless barrister managed to eke out an income, one was to contribute theatrical reviews for a weekly paper. One evening, in the full height of the season, he accordingly entered the small and elegant house of Saint James, there to sit in judgment on a young French actress, Mademoiselle Aurélie, then of great promise, and afterwards of great fame.

Miss Lee, as usual, was in her box, near the stage, surrounded with her court of friends and admirers. The light fell full on her dark, animated face. She wore yellow roses in her braided hair; yellow roses were fastened in the front of her gold-coloured dress. A bouquet of yellow roses rested on her silken lap. Her handsome arms were covered with bracelets; she sparkled with jewels, and looked like a queen. But gayer and far happier than a queen she seemed. The play acted that night was a French vaudeville, light yet charming. Mademoiselle Aurélie sustained her part

admirably. She moved to laughter and to tears even her somewhat *blasé* audience. Twice she was recalled to receive bouquets and applause. The first flowers thrown at her feet were the yellow roses of Grace Lee; and in them, as his own eyes told him, and as the audible whispers around him repeated, was one of the rich bracelets which she had worn that evening. Mr. Owen saw Lily laugh, and Mr. Gerald Lee smile; and, far from her hearing, and within his, he heard none censure, but many admire, this act of a prodigal girl.

Whatever she did, Miss Lee was privileged. Wealth, flattery, praise, love, daily wove her a crown, and proclaimed her queen.

As he was leaving he met her on the staircase. She slowly descended, swayed by the motion of the crowd, between Lily Blount and Gerald Lee. At once she saw him, and, with a smile and a look, she beckoned him to her side.

“Mr. Owen,” she said, “you are deserting

me," for he had not availed himself of her last invitation. Without giving him time to answer, she continued ; "remember that the next time I expect you, woe be to you if you fail me !".

She passed on, and Mr. Owen, with some disdain, returned the wondering looks of many who could not imagine why he had been so distinguished.

CHAPTER X.



THERE is an old Italian legend, that when the sea is calm and fair the Syrens weep. The sky may be without a cloud ; the waters may be smooth and still, yet the Syrens weep, for they know that the storm will come. But joyous and serene as her life, was Grace Lee. For her there seemed no storm, no threatening of evil days lowering behind the cloudless horizon.

The History of the Church called Doctor Crankey to Rome ; but Miss Lee remained behind, happy in her luxurious home with her adopted sister. Towards the close of the season she announced her intention to give a last splendid fête, and the prospect of it sufficed to suspend the

tide of emigration in that wide portion of the fashionable world to which she belonged. In taste and in splendour it fully surpassed all its predecessors. Nothing so elegant, so artistic, so splendid, so like a dream from the Arabian Nights, had yet been seen. The guests, dazzled and enchanted, declared there was no one like Miss Lee for these things. Never before had she obtained a triumph like this. She enjoyed it as she enjoyed everything—completely; and listened with a happy smile, to the blending of genuine admiration and polite flattery, that everywhere reached her ear.

At length even this ceased. Surfeited with pleasure, the guests departed at the hour when thousands, still weary with the labour of one day, were wakening to the toil and the cares of the next. One after the other the splendid rooms were forsaken.

John Owen was the last to depart. As he was leaving the solitary boudoir where he had spent the best part of the evening, neither seeking nor

taking pleasure, a hand was lightly laid on his arm, and a clear voice behind him said,

“Good-night.”

He turned round and found himself face to face with his hostess. She arrested him in an attitude that was free, familiar, and friendly; her dark eyes rested on him with kindness in their glance.

“Good-night,” she said again; and her voice was very sweet. “Good-night, and good-bye,” she resumed, her hand still on his arm, her eyes still on his face. “You are my countryman, Mr. Owen; you were my father’s friend. I have known you since I was a child, and now that perhaps we may never meet again in this wide world, wonder not if I bid a somewhat serious adieu to one whom I have always liked.”

“What—are you again going to travel!” he exclaimed, taken by surprise.

“Ay, to travel, Mr. Owen—to take my longest

journey : I am going from one world to another. Shall we ever meet again?—'tis not likely. Therefore, good-night, and good-bye ; may hope and success, and all good things, and kind spirits, attend you ! ”

He fixed a keen look on her face. Her brow was calm ; her eyes were serene, her lips were smiling ; yet he felt that some meaning lay hidden in all this. “ Good-night will do for the present,” he replied ; “ the final adieu need not be said yet.”

A deep ardent blush gathered on Miss Lee's dark face ; her eyes looked up to his laughingly and proudly.

“ Good-bye,” she said again, with marked emphasis. She turned away, and he stood looking after her with some surprise.

All the guests were gone. Gerald Lee alone, in compliance with Miss Lee's wish, remained behind. He found her in the large and deserted drawing-room ; she stood by the white marble

mantelpiece, her bare arm resting on it and supporting her cheek. As he approached she looked up and, with a smile, held out her hand to him; he raised it to his lips with the tender courtesy that always marked his manner to her, and said, in a pleased tone, "You do not look at all tired."

Large and clear mirrors alternate with high panels of white and gold, decorated the apartment. Grace, her hand still in that of Gerald, cast her look on one of them. It gave back her figure full length, in all its grace of symmetry and splendour of attire. Gerald spoke the truth, when he said she did not look fatigued: never had her eyes shone with more brilliancy,—never had her dusky cheek owned a warmer bloom.

"I feel wonderfully well and happy this evening," she said, looking back to Gerald; "yes, very happy, and not at all fatigued; not so tired as poor little Lily."

On hearing her name, Miss Blount, who sat

on a velvet couch close by, looked up, and languidly said, " Grace is made of steel, I think. Is she not, Mr. Lee ? "

" Never mind what I am made of," answered Grace ; " I have asked Mr. Lee to remain behind to-night, because I must speak to him ; and you, Lily, may as well stay and listen."

She sat down by the young girl ; and Mr. Lee sat down by her. With a smile she began.

" Gerald, I like you ; you have been a friend to me,—a true friend ; yet I have deprived you of a splendid inheritance,—of a noble fortune. Do not interrupt me. You do not know all. Miss Grace Lee had loved you too much and too long not to regret despoiling you. She made her will in my favour, it is true ; but by a letter written on her deathbed, she enjoined me, should certain circumstances ever come to pass, to share or divide her fortune with you. I burned that letter ; for though I was but seventeen, I knew I could trust to my own honour to obey it : and

now what Miss Lee seemed to have foretold, has happened, and the day when I must surrender my trust has come."

She ceased, but looked in vain in Mr. Lee's face for tokens of the surprise she thought to find there.

"I was with Miss Lee when she died," he replied at length, "I read that letter which she wrote and you burned, but I need scarcely say that her will alone is binding upon you."

"In law of course it is," said Grace, with some pride; "but we are not talking of law, Mr. Lee, we are talking of honour."

"Law or honour, what matter? Why seek to divide that which Miss Lee, that which Providence itself, have conspired to unite."

Grace looked laughing in his face. "My friend," she said, gaily, "seven years ago you were offered a choice between love and beauty on one side, and gold and a plain girl on the other. You took love and beauty, and you did

well. And now 'tis my turn, and I am told to choose between gold and a good, handsome husband on one side, and on the other, liberty. Well, Gerald, what love and beauty were to you then, liberty is to me now; that something too sweet to be relinquished; that desire which at any sacrifice must be fulfilled."

He gave her a look of quick reproach.

"Regret not a portionless bride," she resumed; "of the large fortune which Miss Lee left, your half alone remains; mine, I confess it, is gone."

"Gone!" exclaimed Mr. Lee, evidently taken by surprise.

"Yes," said Grace, smiling. "How did I know you would ever care for me; and then it was so large a fortune; but it was not inexhaustible, and I drew upon it too largely. Well, I cannot regret it, for I enjoyed it keenly whilst it was mine, and spent more on others than on myself. I know I might have been more prudent, more wise; but what is done, is done. One

thing I ask you to forgive me, having delayed to tell you this. It was, excuse the weakness, because I wanted to abdicate—as I had reigned—royally.”

“And so you abdicate,” he replied; “you, Miss Lee, who have enjoyed a splendid fortune so nobly.”

“Do not pity me,” she interrupted: “when I was a girl in the North, I longed for wealth, splendour, and all that money yields. For two years and more I have had my wish. What pleasure have I not enjoyed? What place famous or beautiful have I not visited? What society, high bred, high born, witty, brilliant, and delightful, have I not had at my command? But do not dream that I now retire like a monarch satiated with power and splendour. No, I leave the world in the fulness of my happiness,—in the strength and freshness of my years.”

“Leave the world! What do you mean?”

“Hear me out. My father left me a moderate income, more than sufficient to my wants once I retire to obscurity. Yet a boon I ask from you. Lend me the house, which of all her possessions was alone bequeathed to you by Miss Lee. I shall feel a grateful pleasure in holding myself your guest.”

“Surely you do not mean to bury yourself alive? Surely you will stay in the world you enjoy so much?”

“Too much to stay in it! Monarchs who leave the throne cannot seek too total a change, too deep a solitude. It would never do to stay here, no longer the wealthy, the admired, the worshipped Miss Lee, but plain Miss Lee, poor Miss Lee, forgotten Miss Lee! No; I will retire in all my glory, Queen to the last. Again, I say, do not pity me. All is well as it is. I have enjoyed the world; I leave it before disgust has replaced delight. The gods, it is said, love the young, and solitude loves the happy.”

“But you will feel the change!”

“And enjoy it. I am always happy. I never felt a pleasure so keen as this evening: now, as I speak to you, I feel quite joyous. Whatever quickens my blood is health and happiness to me. How many are miserable with their money! Was I not always happy with mine? Even so with the quiet life that opens before me. I shall find in it delights, where others only see torments. Besides, I was reared in a wild home, and I know both the terrors and the charms of solitude. Again, I say, do not pity me.”

She spoke with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes. In vain Mr. Lee tried to change her resolve; Grace had too long thought over it to relinquish it so easily. At length he yielded, yet when she announced her intention to leave for Wales the very next morning, he remonstrated; but Miss Lee was not moved from her purpose.

All the time she had spoken, Lily had remained by her silent and still. Now, when

she ceased, Miss Blount suddenly turned towards her sister, and flinging her arms around her neck, burst into tears.

“What ails you, Lily?” asked Grace, smiling. “If I go and bury myself alive, as Mr. Lee says, do you think I want to bury you with me, or yet to send you back to that stern old Miss Blount, whom you left for me? No; I know of a third course. You will stay with Mr. Lee’s mother until I recall you.”

“But I do not want to leave you, darling,” said Lily, smiling through her tears; “I want to stay with you.”

“Well, then, Lily, I cannot allow it,” gaily, yet seriously, replied Grace.

Miss Blount, though rather faintly it must be confessed, still entreated to be allowed to accompany her sister, who very firmly refused, and referred the matter to Gerald Lee. He gave it as his opinion, that it would certainly not be advisable for Miss Blount to go to Wales just

then, and in his gentlemanly methodical fashion, stated all the reasons for which he entertained this opinion. He concluded with a formal, yet sufficiently cordial assurance of the pleasure Mrs. Gerald Lee would feel to receive Miss Blount in her home and take her under her care.

“ Well, then, it is decided,” said Grace, rising, “ and, like an actor whose part is done, I may retire from the stage. Ah ! would I had acted my part better, more simply, more humbly, with less display, less thought of the world’s praise, for which I confess I have cared too much, little as I did care for its censure. Good-night, Mr. Gerald Lee, think of me in my solitude, think of me, and for my sake, be kind to this young girl.”

She laid her hand on the shoulder of Lily, who again began to weep hysterically, and hid her face on her sister’s bosom.

But Grace, who never wept herself, only smiled and, holding out her hand to Mr. Lee, again bade him good-night.

Gerald Lee was gone. Grace was in her room alone with Lily, who sat quiet and unusually thoughtful in a deep arm chair. Miss Lee stood by her in the act of opening a handsome casket, in which she kept her jewels ; it was bright and sparkling as that of a Queen. She looked at it smiling, "After all," she said, "what is dress? one cannot go beyond diamonds."

Then suddenly turning round she poured the whole contents of the casket into her sister's lap.

"This is your portion," she said, "for I have been too extravagant, I confess it, my poor little Lily, I have kept you nothing. Would I had more to give."

"Give me nothing," exclaimed Lily, looking flushed and excited, "I am an ungrateful girl ; I was born ungrateful—I know it."

Grace laid her hand on her lips and laughed, and Lily turning her head away wept again.

"How can you weep so easily," asked Grace,

"I keep my tears for sorrows that crush and conquer me, not for such trials as we are all born to bear."

She went to the window, raised the thick blue damask curtains and looked on the green and silent park beyond. Dawn was blushing in the sky and the freshness of early morning reposed on everything she saw. She dropped the curtain and turning back to Lily, said quietly,

"I shall have lovely weather to-morrow."

Miss Blount was still fast asleep, when at an early hour on the following morning, Grace stood in the dining-room ready to go, and bidding a calm adieu to Gerald Lee. To Lily Miss Lee did not want to bid good-bye. She did not even wish the servants to suspect that she was going out for more than the day. Though she had amply provided for them all, she again recommended them to Gerald Lee, then bade him farewell. Her cheerfulness contrasted with the gravity of his looks.

Silently he gave her his arm, to take her down to the carriage waiting for her below. In the court they found Vagabond and Scamp, ready to take, as usual, their mistress to the park. Vagabond neighed as he recognised her; and Scamp bounded joyously. Grace stepped up to her favourite horse held by the groom, and softly stroked his cheek; then suddenly turning to Gerald, she said, "Do not sell poor Vagabond; keep him for my sake :—and be kind to Scamp," she added, turning round on the step of the carriage to give his rough head a last caress.

Before Mr. Lee could reply, the dog had bounded in and crouched under the seat. In vain his mistress tried to coax him out; in vain the groom called and threatened him; he only whined and wagged his tail.

"Let him stay," at length said Grace, "he loves an ungrateful mistress better than she deserves to be loved by him. Scamp shall come with me."

She entered the carriage. Rapidly it drove away from the dwelling where she had led a life so luxurious and so splendid; a life, which like a golden dream, had crossed the life of Grace Lee.

CHAPTER XI.

A YEAR had passed away.

It had wrought its changes more dark than sunny. Lily Blount was the wife of Gerald Lee. Mr. Lee's mother was dead; his sister was a widow; Captain Glawdon had fought a last and fatal duel. His antagonist was John Owen. About that encounter much was said, little was known. The fortunate duellist was held up to execration and scorn. He avenged himself with a book called "Timon," that sold well and read widely; then he vanished into obscurity as deep and as complete as that from which he had arisen.

The autumn set in early, wet and wild. It

found Grace Lee in her mountain home, happy though alone; for the History of the Church still kept Doctor Crankey in Rome. Her disappearance from its horizon had astounded the London world. For a week no one talked of anything else. Grace was pitied, admired, and blamed; and finally forgotten.

She too forgot. Gerald and Lily excepted, she corresponded with none. She severed herself completely from her previous life: she kept it in her memory like a brilliant picture, to look at now and then; but beyond this she appeared to have no use for it. Lonely, yet not unhappy, she enjoyed solitude as she once had enjoyed the crowd. Seclusion was as pleasant to her, as ever had been endless variety of scene. Scamp was now the only companion and guardian of walks that rarely extended beyond the limits of her garden. For days and weeks her silent home was not deserted; and her flowers and her books filled the leisure

hours of one to whom for years, with one brief interval, the word leisure had been unknown.

She had resumed the grave studies of her youth, and an autumn afternoon found her engaged with them as of old. She sat in a parlour with a low window, that looked on the garden bounded by rising hills. A bright fire burned in the grate; on the red carpet a sun-beam, that broke through a cloudy and rainy sky and glided down the misty mountain side, fell brilliant as living gold. Grace sat in its light by a table near the window. Her elbow rested upon it; her hand supported her cheek; her other hand caressed the head of Scamp lying by her: a heavy volume lay open on her lap, one of the Greek Fathers. On a stand opposite her was a small Sévres vase filled with wild flowers; the last frail blossoms of pale gold, purple, and azure of the season, gathered by her hand the day before, far in the mountains.

Grace no longer wore the rich silks and bright gems of her former fortunes, but her attire was still tasteful and elegant. Her dark crimson merino fell in graceful folds around her person; her bracelet of gold Arab coins glittered on her arm; her sleeves were trimmed with rich lace; her hair was braided carefully; delicate satin slippers, embroidered with gold, enclosed her feet resting on a velvet cushion; everything around her bespoke taste, comfort, and ease.

As she sat thus quietly the door opened, a neat little parlour-maid stepped in, silently laid a letter before her mistress, then withdrew. Grace read the letter with a smile; it came from Lily Blount, now the wife of Gerald Lee, now enjoying the azure skies, the enchanted shores of happy Sorrento.

The time had been, too, when Grace had returned from foreign travels; the worshipped lady greeted by a thousand glad welcomes, and now she lived alone, and forgotten, in a wild Welsh

home, and another was mistress of all the splendour, homage, and adoration she had resigned.

But some, in things little or great, laugh at sorrow, and defy fate; and Grace only found a secret and proud pleasure in the remembrance of all she had relinquished for love of independence and scorn of a thralldom degrading when it is not that of love, but of Mammon.

She looked up at the sky. The sun shone brightly in a field of pure azure. The vanquished clouds slowly descended to the west, where, couched on the far horison they lay in wait for his coming. Light mists still floated around the mountains, now gathering in some crevice of the rocks, now spreading away softly like a veil, behind which the sun lit their barren flanks, their verdant slopes, and falling streams. Far below them the garden lay fresh and fragrant.

Grace suddenly put away her book, went up to her room, and in a few minutes returned dressed

for a walk in the mountains. She found Scamp anxiously waiting for her; with a smile she summoned him to her side; ere long they had crossed the garden, and entered the mountain desert that enclosed her little Eden.

A mountain region, howsoever beautiful to look at from afar, is not always pleasant on a nearer view, especially in autumn. The wind then wakens the saddest echoes of the barren-looking rocks; the paths have vanished, washed away by heavy rains; the streamlets have swollen into torrents; dark and threatening clouds pass over the peaks and valleys, and seem to guard and forbid their approach; the whole aspect of nature, though grand, is wild and desolate. But Grace, accustomed to a wild life in her youth, feared neither the sadness nor the loneliness of mountain scenery. Where others saw nothing but inaccessible and gloomy caverns, she knew of paths safe and dry that led out into the open country, and to green spots, and to low valleys

where happy summer still lingered. One of these paths she now took.

It led her down to scenery softer and less grand than that which she could have found higher up. A stream, gently shaded by a few broad trees, flowed through a quiet valley; here and there scattered on its banks, or climbing the mountain side, rose small thatched dwellings, with their patch of garden. The whole place had a look both pastoral and wild that would have charmed a painter's heart.

The sun was not near its setting and Grace, to whom this part of the country was little known, resolved for once to explore this valley to its end. She walked on for an hour and, save that the dwellings became fewer, then vanished altogether, she still seemed to pass through the same scenery. An abrupt turning at length brought a change, both complete and sudden.

The open and sunlit valley had become a dark and narrow gorge, lying between two steep

mountains, clothed with pines, from their summit to their very base, and washed by the rapid and foaming waters of a sullen looking torrent. Its rushing noise and the shrill scream of a bird in the air above were the only sounds that disturbed the silence of the spot. Still better pleased with its savage beauty than with the smiling scenes she had left behind, Grace sat down on a fragment and enjoyed her solitude. Some time elapsed before she perceived that it was not so complete as she had at first imagined.

High on a projecting crag rose a tall and narrow house, something between a modern dwelling and an ancient ruin. A wild garden badly fenced in, straggled down around it and enclosed it on every side; but the gate was broken, and the doors-steps were worn and moss covered, the wooden door itself looked frail and disjointed; and part of the roof had been laid bare by some treacherous mountain gust.

It stood there isolated and exposed to every

blast, like a watch tower of old, midway between the brown mountains and the white torrent; threatened by the one, sapped by the other, yet still, spite of time and many a storm, bearing a stern front in its decay.

The sun was now setting; Grace faced the west, she saw its last rays glide down the heights that closed the valley and light with a glow more lurid, than warm, the walls of the house. Gradually even this faded away; the sky became of a dark and cloudy grey, and the mountains shrouding themselves into soft mists, took that tint of intense and exquisite blue which they wear in evening. Scamp whined impatiently, and his mistress took the hint, by rising to turn homewards. She had scarcely gone three steps when a low deep sound caught her ear. She walked on without heeding it, but soon stopped short, a white flash had crossed the sky and a few heavy drops of rain came borne by the wind against her face; then there broke another and

a louder peal, answered by every rocky cliff in the whole valley. A storm was beginning, a storm in the mountains; a grand sight, which Grace had often enjoyed, but never before without the shelter of a roof. Awhile she stood still, hesitating between the house near her and the more distant hamlet; the sky was intensely dark; the torrent flowed beneath it white and angry; pale mists swiftly descended the mountain side like evil spirits hastening to the conflict; the rain began to fall heavily, with it all hesitation vanished; Grace hastened up the path above which stood the solitary dwelling; she crossed the garden and knocked at the door, which unexpectedly yielded to her touch.

It admitted her to a room something between a kitchen and a parlour. A large deal-wood table occupied the centre; a few rude chairs stood against the walls; a Dutch clock ticked behind the door, and an ardent fire burned on the wide hearth, by which an elderly woman of grotesque

ugliness sat sewing, or rather mending some male garment. As Grace stood on the threshold, not knowing whether to enter or retire, Scamp decided the question by uttering a low growl, which ended in a short sharp bark.

“Lawk a mercy !” with a start, exclaimed the old lady, of whom Grace now noticed that she had neither the speech nor attire of a native Welsh woman ; an unmistakeable Cockney accent characterised the former, and a certain city neatness the latter.

“Down, sir,” said Grace to Scamp, who dropped his ears and wagged his tail ; then pushing the door more widely open, she stepped in, and with an apology explained the cause of her intrusion.

“Don’t mention it, ma’am,” civilly replied the old lady, whose attire and manner bespoke something between a housekeeper and a servant ; “pray walk in, ma’am, and take a seat. This is awful weather, as you say, and I am sure if my

dear young gentleman were at home, he would make you very welcome, and the little doggie too ; pretty dear."

"The little doggie!" nowise soothed by this compliment, entered with a subdued growl, and with a watchful glance lay down by his mistress. Grace drew a seat near the hearth, and unfastened and shook her cloak, which her hostess officiously took from her and hung up to dry.

"Only think, ma'am, you are nearly wet through; do take off your bonnet; pray make yourself at home; my young gentleman won't be in just yet, and even if he were to come in, I am sure he would only be too happy to receive a lady! Lawk a mercy, what a flash! If my poor young gentleman is out in them mountains he'll get wet to the skin, poor dear! and he is so delicate—a mere gossamer."

She sat down with an air of concern. Grace repressed a smile, suggested, not by her uneasi-

ness, but by the comparison in which it had pleased her fancy to express it.

“Do you like Wales, ma’am?” was the next and somewhat abrupt remark of her hostess.

“Yes,” replied Grace, “don’t you?”

“I can’t say I do to live in,” was the qualified reply. “If it were not for my dear young gentleman I don’t think I could stay here twenty-four hours.”

“Then you stay for his sake?”

“Why yes, ma’am, what would the poor dear do without me? He is as simple as a child, ma’am, and the sweetest temper? There never was such a blessing to all Wales as when he came to settle in it.”

“And was that long ago?” asked Grace; who began to feel inquisitive about this paragon of goodness and perfection.

“Just upon a week, ma’am. The very day he came, he cured a poor woman of the fever; before yesterday he set a broken arm, and to-day

he is gone through wet and wind to see a poor consumptive creature."

"Is he a physician then?"

"No a'am, he is not a physician; he is what *I* call a great deal better—a surgeon. Do you think the people about here are likely to pay well? Not that I mean to say my young gentleman is not a great deal above depending on anything of the sort. Still it might be a consideration, you know."

That it might be a very important one Grace saw readily enough from the choice of the surgeon's dwelling, and the bare and poverty-stricken aspect of everything around her. Her reply was vague and doubtful. This was a matter she said that depended entirely on the class of people with whom the surgeon had to deal.

"Ah! I see, I see!" sagaciously said the old lady, and she looked rather thoughtfully at the fire, with her work lying idly on her lap.

From this fit of abstraction she suddenly woke up to observe, as she saw Grace looking at her cloak :

“It is not dry yet, ma'am, and the storm is not over ; pray don't think of going ! My young gentleman will not be in for hours, and as I said, he would only be too happy to receive a lady. But will you take nothing ?—you must be thirsty after your long walk.”

In vain Miss Lee assured her that she wanted for nothing ; her hostess was determined on being hospitable, and left the room to produce some exquisite elder wine of her own making.

Grace remained alone rather amused at her position. Here she was intruding her feminine presence on the bachelor establishment of a young and gallant surgeon new to the neighbourhood. There seemed, moreover, no means of departing for some time. The thunder still pealed amongst the mountains, and the sound of the falling rain blended with that of the

torrent that rushed past the house. Grace loved those wild sounds mingling vaguely around that wild home. She listened to them in a dreamy mood ; sitting close to the fire with her feet on the low iron fender, one of her hands supporting her bare head. An unexpected sound, that of the opening door, suddenly roused her from her reverie and caused her to look round.

CHAPTER XII.

A GENTLEMAN stood on the threshold looking at her with evident surprise. The light came from behind him and fell on her face; he saw her, but she could not see him.

“Miss Lee!” he exclaimed, entering. Scamp rose and wagged his tail with friendly welcome, and, with a start, Grace recognised the voice, and as he approached, the features and bearing of John Owen.

“Mr. Owen,” she said, rising quietly. “Ah! how are you to-day?”

She held out her hand to him as if they had met the week before.

“To-day,” he echoed, taking her hand;

"how many days is it since we last met, Miss Lee?"

"Really, I do not know: four hundred odd I dare say. What matter; you know, or perhaps you do not know, that I do not believe in Time. Do you?"

"I cannot help myself; I must believe in it. And how have you been since those four hundred days odd?"

"Well: and you?"

"Well, too, thank you; though somewhat wet just now."

He was wet even to the dark hair that clung to his cheek and brow. He shook his head impatiently, took off his cloak, hung it up by that of Grace, then sat down, like her, by the hearth. For the first time it struck Miss Lee that John Owen was no other than the fascinating young surgeon, master of the house in which she had taken shelter.

"Mr. Owen," she said, suddenly; "can you give me some information?"

"That depends on the nature of the information," he replied, looking up with a smile.

"In whose house am I?"

"In mine, for the present."

Grace smiled, too, as she looked at him; a dark forbidding man, and remembered he was also the "dear young gentleman." He continued:

"You did not know it?"

"No; I came in driven by the storm, and found a most hospitable reception."

"Yes, Mrs. Skelton is very kind, and here she is." As he spoke the housekeeper entered, bearing on a tray the bottle of elder wine, and a plate, with a glass and a biscuit.

"Lawk a mercy!" she began, on seeing Mr. Owen.

"Don't mention it," he interrupted impatiently; "wet never kills. What are you bringing us? Elder wine! rank poison! Do

not touch it, Miss Lee ; I have some port from Mr. Hanley's own cellar, which I brought down here to drink his health with, and you shall try it."

He opened a cupboard, brought forth a bottle, and filled the glass of Grace. She took it, amused at the half offended look of Mrs. Skelton.

"I like wine," she said ; "it reminds me of the sun, of vineyards, of festoons of luscious grapes running from tree to tree, and of merry brown southern faces alive with life and light."

"And it reminds me," morosely replied John Owen, "of the luxurious tables of the rich ; of after-dinner jests, loud and vacant ; of hoarse laughter, sickening imbecility ; of faces flushed with excess ; of sounds that deafen the brain, and of glaring lights that weary the eyes."

Grace smiled and drank quietly, then spoke no more, but glanced furtively at her host. He sat opposite her in a bending attitude ; the light of the flame played on his swarthy face ; it looked

darker and more forbidding than ever. The brow now seemed habitually knit, and the mouth sarcastic. "Timon, indeed," thought Grace.

Timon made no sort of effort to entertain her. He left her to Mrs. Skelton, who sat a little in the background, and was as voluble as he was silent. She chose the fertile theme of his virtues and perfections, and did not seem to consider his presence any objection. For some time he did not appear to mind her; but Mrs. Skelton, like the lover who left his mistress to write to her, happening, in her pleasure of talking about him to forget that he was by, and to designate him two or three times as her dear young gentleman, deploring, in the same breath, the delicacy of his health and general tenderness of his nature, he raised his head with a calm amazement that nearly disconcerted the gravity of Grace. Then, like Neptune looking above the ocean, when his domain had been invaded by Eolus, with a word he checked this unloosening of speech.

“Mrs. Skelton,” he said, rather grandly, “can we have tea, if you please?”

“To be sure, sir,” she replied, rising at once to prepare the meal.

Satisfied with this he relapsed into his previous attitude and silence. In less than a quarter of an hour the tea was made and poured out, and the table placed between John Owen and his guest. He was as silent during the meal as before it; when it was over, Grace rose to go.

“The storm is over,” she said, “and I think I can now return to my own home.”

“And there is nothing in this sorry dwelling to make me press you to stay longer,” he replied, rising too.

He took down his hat, Grace put on her bonnet and cloak, whilst Mrs. Skelton emitted doubts on the wisdom of departing as yet. The event proved the correctness of her conjectures. As Mr. Owen and his guest stood on the

threshold of the open door, they paused involuntarily.

The storm was over; the moon shone dimly in a clouded sky; the mists that slept on the opposite mountains looked chill and gray in her cold light; bright and glancing the torrent flowed in the gloom of the valley below; but there was an unusual fullness in its sound that at once caught the ear of John Owen. He stepped out; a look showed him all. Wherever his eye fell water flowed; the mountain stream had overrun its banks, and everywhere broke around the projecting crag on which rose his dwelling; one spot alone remained free; the steep and pathless mountain behind. Grace had followed him out, and with a dismayed glance saw all this.

"There is no help for it," at length said her host, "you must stay here to-night, Miss Lee, and accept of Mrs. Skelton's room."

"I suppose so," she quietly replied, and,

submitting patiently to a disagreeable necessity, she re-entered the house, took off her bonnet and cloak, and resumed her seat by the fire-side. John Owen too put by his hat and went back to his place; Scamp, as if he understood it all, stretched himself at full length between them, and basking in the light of the fire, fell fast asleep. Mrs. Skelton, after exhausting every adjective of regret and condolence, imitated his example, and nodded over her work. Her quiet figure in the back-ground did not break on the tête-à-tête of the two who sat by the ardent fire, with the lamp burning between them. At first both were silent; then John Owen, giving his sleeping housekeeper an impatient glance, but feeling himself bound by the laws of hospitality to do or say something, looked up at Grace and suddenly opened the conversation. "And so, Miss Lee," he said, "you are again paying a visit to Wales?"

"No—I am not on a visit: I live here."

“Ah! indeed,” and he looked surprised, “I thought,” he resumed, “your tastes were essentially wandering.”

“They were so once, but now I sit down in peace by the domestic hearth, and traveller-like think it pleasant to remember the lands I have visited, and to see again with the mind’s eye the pictures, of which the living reality once charmed me, and I live a quiet life in the house that once belonged to the late Miss Lee.”

He looked at her keenly. He sought in her eyes and on her brow the signs of wounded love or mortified pride; but no heart sorrow, no bitter and corroding thought had there left their traces. There was a pause; he broke it by saying, “And so, Miss Lee, this is now your destiny! Not two years ago we met here in Wales. You were rich and lived in a tumult of pleasure; I was poor, but ambitious, and richer than you in hope. We left within the same week; you to spend your fortune, I to win mine. And now Time has

brought us back, children of the same soil, to our mountains, and finds you as wearied of pleasure as I am wearied of ambition."

"No, I cannot say that," replied Grace; "I was not at all wearied of pleasure."

"Then what a dreary change! For one accustomed to wealth, to luxury, to endless adulation, to find herself thus almost poor, and entirely deserted. How you must hate it, Miss Lee!"

"No, I cannot say that either."

"Do you like it, then?" he asked, with a look that seemed to tell her, "you may try to deceive me, but I warn you, it is useless."

The warning was not seen or heeded by Grace. Without answering his question she looked at the fire and smiled, more to herself than to him.

"I was reared a poor girl," she said at length; "my father loved me, but he was what is called near; he bought my frocks himself, and they were neither many nor splendid. I remember a pink gingham that nearly sent me mad with

joy, for I confess it, I have always been too fond of dress. When he died and I went to the North and lived in a place not quite so picturesque, but nearly as wild as this, between an old priest and his cousin, who always thought me too fine, I was still worse off. I was scarcely smarter than a cottage girl, yet I was very happy. When I became so suddenly rich, and had more pocket-money, even as a minor, than I have now of entire income, I bought everything I set my eyes on, and thought I never had enough; but since that fortune has left me, I have fallen quite naturally into the old way, and I whose dresses were said to outnumber those of any woman in England, am now quite satisfied with such toilet as I can afford. And with other things it is as with this;—everything around me is changed, yet I am happy.”

“Philosophy!” observed John Owen, a little ironically.

“Not a bit of it,” she replied; “temperament,

no more. My temper has always led me to be happy; and I am so, perhaps, because I make no effort to succeed. I read, I tend my flowers, I work, I take long walks, and thus life passes pleasantly."

"And you see no one?"

"No one."

"Yet you were fond of society, of pleasure, of travelling."

"Well; and have I not had more than my share of them all?"

"Your solitude must be oppressive."

She laughed gaily at the idea.

"Truly you have a happy temper."

"Mr. Owen," said Grace, throwing back her head a little, "that is not all; I would scorn to be conquered by anything mortal. When God lays his hand on me I submit. All else I defy."

She spoke with a warm flush on her cheek; with truth in her eyes and frankness in her very

tone. He looked at her with something between admiration and envy in his gaze ; he, too, defied everything mortal, but not quite in a mood so open and so free as this once spoiled child of fortune.

“ And so,” suddenly said Grace, in her turn assuming the lead in the conversation, “ and so you too, Mr. Owen, are settled here. How do you like it ? ”

“ I am like you—I like anything.”

“ No, Mr. Owen, I do not like anything ; but I bear anything. How can you, a man of talent and energy, like being buried in this wilderness ? ”

“ Because the peopled world gave me no opening, or none such as a man of honour could pursue. Better a desert with its silence and solitude.”

“ Are you happy ? ”

“ I never looked for happiness, but for that which I never could win—victory.”

Grace looked at him,—their eyes met ; he

smiled; the smile of a still defiant, though vanquished man.

"Yes," she said, "you have been conquered, and I have read your 'Timon.' It is a bad book, Mr. Owen; cynical, misanthropic, cruel, full of slanders on human nature, and with but one redeeming virtue—its marvellous eloquence."

"You know how to mingle gall and sweetness, Miss Lee."

"You may smile, Mr. Owen; I know that in what I have said, you liked the gall and not the sweetness. You did not write that book to get praise, but to inflict a sting. You threw down a glove of defiance, and when it was picked up, and you got insult for insult and scorn for scorn, you felt glad, for you knew the sting had gone home."

"And pray how do you know all this?" he asked, somewhat surprised.

"Easily enough; if there had been but two or three grains more of hemlock or night-

shade in my temper, I should have felt just like you."

"Hemlock and nightshade,—thank you, Miss Lee."

"You need not, you are welcome."

"I wonder," he said, looking up at her fixedly, "I wonder how it is, Miss Lee, we seem unable to meet without quarrelling. I shelter you this evening beneath my roof, a belated traveller; we begin quietly enough, and you end by telling me that I am made up of hemlock and nightshade!"

She laughed, but said, without replying, "Mr. Owen, your fire is nearly out, your housekeeper is fast asleep, your lamp is burning low, and your guest is getting faint with this long vigil."

He called Mrs. Skelton, who woke with an apologetic start, and at once showed Miss Lee up to the room they were to share for the night.

When the housekeeper came down the next morning, she found her master already below; he stood at the open door looking on the high

waters that still shut in his dwelling. On hearing Mrs. Skelton he turned from the view with an impatient look and a clouded brow.

"The poor young lady will not be able to go to-day yet, sir," suggested Mrs. Skelton, whilst lighting the fire.

"Miss Lee is not so very young," sharply replied Mr. Owen, to whom the idea of having "a young lady" thus fastened upon him was highly distasteful.

"I don't think she is old either," a little tartly returned Mrs. Skelton, "but young or old she is a dear creature. Not pretty, perhaps, but a great deal better: a real lady without a bit of pride."

"Is she up?"

"She is not awake yet," was the evasive answer.

"Mrs. Skelton," said Owen, stopping short before her, "where did Miss Lee sleep last night?"

Dead silence.

"I confess," he continued, looking displeased, "poor as this place is in accommodation, I did not expect the sight which met my eyes this morning: as I came down stairs, I saw through your room-door, which you had inadvertently left open, Miss Lee dressed and fast asleep in an old arm-chair. Now——"

"Indeed, sir," deprecatingly interrupted Mrs. Skelton, "I could not help it. She is a very nice lady, but surely she has been used to have her way. Once she got out of me that I had rheumatic pains, all I could say or do would not make her take my bed, which, to say the truth, was never meant for two. She said she was young and strong, and that it would be an adventure for her to sleep in a chair. I told her you would be vexed; she laughed and replied, she was not afraid of you, and bade me not tell. In short, she would have her way. So she just took out her pins,—shook down her beautiful hair,—I wanted to lend her one of my frilled

nightcaps, but it seems she never wears any,— then wrapped herself up in her cloak, sat down with that big dog of hers at her feet, laid her head back, and in five minutes was as soundly asleep as a child ; and there she is sleeping still, I'll be bound."

"No, Mrs. Skelton, I am awake now, if you please," said the voice of Grace, entering the room, followed by Scamp.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Mrs. Skelton, a little confused.

"For having said that I was still asleep,—I grant it freely. Mr. Owen, have the charity to tell me if there will be any getting away to-day out of your Noah's ark ! To me the waters of the deluge still seem to flow high and threatening."

"Noah's ark has proved but a sorry sleeping-place for you, Miss Lee."

"Now good Mr. Noah, do not look so put out ; on my honour I never slept better : but,

seriously, do you think this stone ark of yours solid?"

"It will last longer than either you or I,—provided some rock fall not on it from above."

"I do not fear rocks just now. All my dread is of water. Surely that perverse little stream must end by going away."

His reply was ambiguous. There was no accounting for the caprices of mountain streams; this one might flow back in its bed in a few hours, or it might remain thus a few days. Grace at first looked blank, but soon rallying, asked if the ark were victualled? Her host turned to his housekeeper, who looked up from the fire-place to reply, by reckoning categorically on her fingers.

"In the first place we have got plenty of tea."

"And water, ditto," suggested Grace; "so far good."

"Secondly, a little sugar."

"Better a little, than none," wisely said Miss Lee. "Any milk, Mrs. Skelton?"

“Not a drop of milk or cream in the wide world,” replied Mrs. Skelton, emphatically raising both her hands.

“If some stray goat would only pay us a visit. Bah! what matter; one can do without milk at a pinch. Any bread, Mrs. Skelton?”

“Half a loaf, ma’am, but plenty of flour.”

“And an oven for baking,—I see it. What else?”

Mrs. Skelton coughed and looked ashamed.

“To-morrow is market-day,” she began, “and not having any idea how that tricky water was going to serve us out——”

“You had laid in no provisions—naturally.”

“You have come to a splendid household, Miss Lee,” said John Owen, looking not ashamed, but galled at this exposure of his poverty, “magnificent is the hospitality you receive! Not even a bed to sleep in—not even a meal to eat!”

He laughed, and Grace echoed the sound with a light mocking laugh, as pleasant as his was

bitter. He looked up at her, reddening and irritated. The smile of her laugh was still playing on her features like the last ripple of a breaking wave.

“Come,” she resumed gaily, “I see poor Scamp, with his robust canine appetite, is likely to prove a troublesome guest; so he must needs act the part of dove. Scamp!”

The Newfoundland, who was lying gravely on the hearth, rose at the voice of his mistress. She sat down, tore a leaf out of her pocket-book, wrote a few words on it with her pencil-case, twisted the paper, and fastened it securely under the collar of Scamp. She took care to inform him it was for Phoebe her maid, and for no one else; he heard her with a sagacious air, then, when she beckoned to him, he followed her out, already half understanding his mission. On the door-steps Grace paused. The morning was soft and stormy, with a clouded sky; everywhere heavy mists limited the horizon.

Below Miss Lee the water rushed with a deep and sullen sound, and soon vanished, hidden in the low clouds which filled the bottom of the valley. She looked wistfully at the white and foaming stream, then at Scamp, and laid her hand on his head with evident reluctance. At length she took a sudden resolve, stooped, gave his rough head a hasty kiss, and with the word "Home," sent him on his errand. Scamp deliberately shook himself, walked down to the water's edge, plunged in, and gravely swam down the stream. The gaze of his mistress followed him until he was out of sight, then with a sigh of relief, she re-entered the house; on the threshold she found her host.

"I envy you that noble creature," he said with some warmth.

"Do you! then when I part from Scamp you shall have him. You do not think there is any danger for him, do you?" she added, giving another look at the foamy track

along which her faithful Newfoundland had vanished.

“Certainly not, if one may judge by the cool and easy style in which he took his departure. Besides the stream is sure to become smoother as he goes down.”

“Heaven have mercy on us!” solemnly ejaculated the voice of Mrs. Skelton from within. They looked, and saw her standing the picture of grief and dismay before the open cupboard. Melancholy to relate! her half loaf had during the night become the prey of foraging mice. The sight of this calamity at first quite overcame her; but soon rallying :—

“I’ll get a cat!” she exclaimed in great wrath. “I’ll get a cat! the nasty little vermin shall not have it all their own way.”

The breakfast was then reduced to tea, with little sugar and no milk.

“Well, Miss Lee,” said John Owen, casting an ironical look at the empty board, “what do you

say to this meal? Surely it offers you the charm of novelty! What a breakfast for a lady who has had the pink and flower of French cooks; who has fed on the most luxurious fare of every land: bad tea to drink and nothing to eat."

"I do not care," independently replied Grace; "I feel above eating just now. I have a fancy that it must be something excessively vulgar. So, Mr. Owen, please not to lavish any of your pity upon me. It is not needed."

And allowing Mrs. Skelton to lament this unfortunate event, to abuse the water for shutting them in, and the mice for eating the bread, Miss Lee quietly drank her tea and looked as she said, "above eating." The meal over,—it did not take long to despatch,—she suddenly vanished with Mrs. Skelton. Soon the sound of their two voices, one clear and pleasant as youth, the other harsh and unsteady as age, reached Mr. Owen from a dilapidated pantry behind the house. In going up stairs he caught a glimpse of them;

they were both deep in flour and dough ; Mrs. Skelton was imparting precepts in the art of bread-making, which Grace—a white apron on, her sleeves tucked up, and her handsome arms bare and free—was reducing into practice. She looked merry and amused with her novel task.

Glad to find that his guest had disposed of herself so as not to tax his politeness too far, so as not to render hospitality a bore and a burden, Timon retreated to a wide den-like room on the first floor, where it was his wont to retire to the company he best loved, that of his own thoughts ; thoughts too gloomy and bitter, but all the more congenial to his habitual mood.

There was a window that overlooked the valley ; it commanded a view, grand and dreary, of barren heights and rushing waters. He stood watching them, as sullen and discontented with his fate as they seemed to be with their rocky bed. A disappointed ambitious man never yet made a genuine misanthrope. John Owen hated the

world, but not the world's prizes ; his scorn did not reach them ; and whilst a longing and a wish remained, what could solitude be but a ceaseless torment. He stood as we said by the window, his elbow resting on its bar, his brow on his hand, his gaze diving down the valley, seeking nothing, and pleased with nothing that it rested on. Yet it watched abstractedly at first, attentively in the end, a black speck slowly coming up the stream and seen for some time through mists, then more near and distinct.

It was a boat manned by two men ; he guessed their errand, and went down to prepare Grace for her liberation.

He found her in the kitchen parlour kneeling on the floor by the fire, watching the baking of a small round cake in its hot ashes, and absorbed in the task.

"Miss Lee," he said, "I bring welcome tidings ; the starving garrison is relieved ; a boat is coming to bear you away from your dreary prison-house."

“Scamp is safe!” were her first words; “and so they are coming for me! I was getting used to this Noah’s ark—to this being shut out from the world and feeling thrown on one’s own resources. Now it seems I must go back to civilisation! And my cake is not quite baked, though getting of a rich brown hue, most tempting to the eye. Well I had always heard that life is made up of disappointments. Are they near, I wonder!”

“I’ll go and see, ma’am,” officiously said Mrs. Skelton.

She left the house, stayed a while away, then came back with the tidings that the boat was really come for Miss Lee. Grace half sighed; she looked reluctant to depart, and did not care to hide it; she rose, however, put on her bonnet and cloak, and stepped out. Yes, there lay the boat quietly waiting for her at the foot of the crag, with her two rowers resting from their toil.

“Do you stay in the citadel, or will you leave it awhile?” asked Grace, turning to her host.

“Thank you,” he carelessly replied; “I feel well here, and nothing calls me out.”

“Stay, then, in your island. Thanks for your hospitality. Mrs. Skelton, I fancy my cake is burning.”

“Bless you no, ma’am; shall I send it to you?”

“No, eat it hot for my sake.”

She kissed her, gave her hand to Mr. Owen, and with his aid stepped into the boat, which at once shot swiftly down the stream.

CHAPTER XIII.

JOHN OWEN watched the boat until it was out of sight, then re-entered the house. He sat down by the fire-side, not sorry to find his home again his own. Everything in his late guest suggested lessons against which his pride rebelled. Her hopeful cheerfulness was like the living and embodied reproach of his discouraged and bitter mood. She had forsaken the brightest realities of life, and she seemed to deride sorrow. Wealth, the world's incense, love perhaps, had passed from her, and still she smiled like one whom fate could not reach. Change of fortune had not changed her. If he had found her depressed, if he had detected in her manner a

whit more humility and less pride, John Owen would have despised her as one whom the loss or gain of money could move ; but seeing her unaltered, he felt compelled, according to his estimate of men and women, to respect and admire Grace Lee as one above both her sex and her kind, as one whose heart fate could not conquer, whose pride fortune could not humble. He was too much absorbed in these thoughts to notice some very suspicious feminine proceedings then going on under his eyes. Grace, in her message home had inserted a liberal order for provisions, which the boat had brought and the boatmen duly delivered to Mrs. Skelton. This lady had prudently ignored the fact, until the boat was fairly gone ; for as she internally argued, her dear young gentleman was odd at times, and he might just have packed the whole of the goodly hamper back, which would have been a mortal shame, besides that it might have affronted the kind young lady. So she kept her peace,

and waited until she saw her master deep in one of his thinking fits, to introduce and safely stow away the said hamper. The noise, however, roused him, and he looked up interrogatively.

Mrs. Skelton, standing between the hamper and her master, said in careless explanation—

“It’s only a bit of a basket, sir, which the lady has been kind enough to send, just until that water goes down and I can go to market—”

“Very well,” he carelessly interrupted, for he saw nothing extraordinary in this, and rising, he took his hat and went out.

The swollen stream might flow around his dwelling and shut him in from men; but the mountain side, though steep, still afforded space for wandering. He did not go far; high up above the valley, underneath the projecting brow of the mountain, he found a barren hollow, and there, though the place was bleak and cold, he threw himself down recklessly. Lying thus on that hard bed of rock; below him the waters he

could not cross, above him the cliffs he could not scale, his gloomy fancy saw in his present position, the type of his destiny.

Yet his thoughts were not all bitter; the modern poetry of sentiment he had not; but he had much of the more healthful poetry of the ancients. He loved the beautiful country in which he was born and had been reared; dear to him were her skies, her noble mountains, her lakes and streams. Dear to him under every sky were the grand and solemn aspects of nature. As he now lay there, stretched in one of her wildest haunts, he found an austere charm in the almost wintry mien she wore. Around him lay a wilderness of heath, brown rocks, and stunted brushwood. Near his head an invisible spring trickled down from above with a low murmur; above him spread a gray and ever-changing sky. The spot was not beautiful, but it was lone; it was not pleasant, but it lay on a Welsh mountain, wild and free; and as the wind swept by him with

a low wail, as clouds floated past white and chill through the silent air, John Owen, spite of a disappointment that still rankled eager ambition and stern pride, felt almost happy.

There may be something in the breath of the mountains that quickens the flow of the blood and thrills through the nerves ; but these glorious children of earth, born of her in her vigorous youth, when she could bring forth none save a Titan brood, have a still deeper power over the soul than over the frame of man. More than the pathless sea to the mariner, to the rider his swift steed, do they speak to him who seeks them of liberty. They dwell in a region where ceases all law save that of the elements ; they rear above the clouds that form our lower sky, barren summits that know no master, and Toil, that tyrant of the pleasant valleys and fertile plains, sleeps at their feet a silent and a conquered foe.

When John Owen came down and re-entered his dreary dwelling, he found Mrs. Skelton

standing on the door-step and examining some bright object.

"Sir," she said, holding it up to him, "if you please, the lady has forgotten this; outlandish pieces made to look like gold though not quite so bright."

"They are gold," replied Mr. Owen, recognising the favourite bracelet of Grace.

Mrs. Skelton smiled with sceptical shrewdness. "Gold pieces," she argued, "were not quite so plentiful as to be strung that way for ladies to wear round their wrists; however, if she only knew where the lady lived, she would return it of course."

"I shall leave it with her the first time I go out," interrupted Mr. Owen, and taking the bracelet he quietly put it in his pocket.

Mrs. Skelton looked blank, he perceived, but would not heed it. He wanted to see and know of Miss Lee as little as possible. He had come to Wales to break with a past which her presence

brought back to him vivid and distinct. He resolved to call, return her bracelet, and see her no more. Garrulous Mrs. Skelton should have no hand in the business, and woman-like entangle him into an acquaintance.

For two days the torrent rose higher around his dwelling; it reached the threshold, then retreated.

“That enemy at least is vanquished,” thought Owen, as he stood on the door-step watching the sullen waters going back to their bed. He went out in the afternoon to visit a few patients; the sun was near its setting when he reached Miss Lee’s house, and her little maid Phœbe introduced him into the parlour of her mistress.

She was absent, but tokens of her presence remained. The low chair she had filled still stood by the table, with the cushion on which her feet had rested. Her Greek Father lay open; a skein of silk marked the page she had been reading; a piece of canvas with a rose half

worked, and in a vase by it a living rose (whereby to copy the shading of Nature), completed this mixture of grave and frivolous occupations. John Owen glanced at the Greek volume, then at the unfinished task, then smiled a little ironically.

“What do you think of it?” asked the voice of Grace.

He looked up; she stood on the threshold of a glass door that opened on the garden. Behind her spread a clear back-ground of air, breezy trees, and blue sky; whilst on her face and figure gently fell the mellow light of the sun-lit room.

“Have I succeeded or not?” she continued, entering.

“Very well, indeed;” he replied, rising and accepting her extended hand. “And so,” he added, resuming his seat as she carelessly sank down into hers; “and so you read Greek, Miss Lee?”

“To be sure,” she promptly replied; “don’t

you?" And she gave him a look of seeming wonder.

"A little," he diffidently answered.

"How did you leave your ark?"

"Easily enough; the deluge subsided."

"How is Mrs. Skelton?"

"Well: she found this."

He drew forth the bracelet of gold coins.

"Oh, I am so glad!" exclaimed Grace with sparkling eyes. "Thank you, Mr. Owen, thank you."

Joyfully she took it from his hand; then taking up her work she said:

"I do this, Mr. Owen, because I like it, and because you being a sort of savage—"

"Eh!"

"Well, what are you? Have you not forsworn civilisation and her wicked ways?"

"True; pray go on—'and being a sort of savage—'"

"Do you prefer Timon? Apropos, Mr. Owen,

I have been looking over that book again. Do you know I am astonished you ever wrote it."

"Indeed!" he answered with some indifference, for he already wanted to be gone.

"Yes, indeed," she continued, going on with her rose; "in the first place, it fails as a novel."

"It was not meant to succeed as a novel," he said with some disdain.

"Then, pray, what business has 'A Tale' in the title-page?"

"None, I confess it. 'Truths' should have been the word."

"In my opinion, 'Abuse' would have answered better. And this is what I cannot make out. How could you—yes, Mr. Owen, how could you stoop to abuse?"

She looked at him fixedly and inquiringly, and he returned the glance with one of some wonder at this catechising. She composedly resumed:

"I know that some men of genius have stooped to satire, but I also know that it was not then that

their genius burned with purest and brightest flame. Abuse is so very vulgar! Ay, in the streets or in a palace its essence is still vulgarity; and then it is so easy!—who cannot, once fairly about it, abuse something or some one? The only art is to ransack memory for reflections, false or true; for epithets choice or coarse, then to deal them forth according to the measure of one's taste and temper. It is bad spoken, and written ten times worse. For who knows not that where there is a failure of some higher power, poverty of invention, of imagination, feeling, fancy and the noble gifts that spring like gracious plants from the depths of a writer's heart; abuse of a class, a creed or a nation is resorted to, like the hot spice with which a distressed cook tries to hide the deficiencies of an indifferent dish. For my part, I confess it, when I read such a book, I keep my pity for the satirist. I pity him as I pity that peevish and fretful insect the wasp, that has just power enough to sting, but to whom God has not granted the

nobler and mightier power to wound. Indeed, Mr. Owen," she added, laying down her work to give him a compassionate glance, "I think it a great pity and a great shame you should have mixed yourself up with that low-minded, mean-hearted, and bad-tempered class of people."

She spoke very composedly, without undue haste, with nothing like apprehension in her look or hesitation in her tone. John Owen had heard her through, mute, and amazed at her audacity. He possessed that power of subdued sarcasm which a look, a word, a sneer can express—a power than which nothing perhaps in this wide world is more feared and hated; but for once he found one as fearless as others were cowardly, one who in a few minutes told him more truths than he had ever heard during his whole lifetime. The secret of winning power is often to assume it as granted. By taking on herself the right to lecture Timon, Grace Lee secured it once for all. Her daring and

her frankness left a soothing charm in the very sting her unsparing speech inflicted. Pleased with her in spite of himself, he condescended to argue with her, a thing he rarely did with man or woman.

“If I understand you rightly,” he began, “you wish for a millenium of peace.”

“Peace!” she interrupted, “peace on earth!—whilst wrong reigns insolent and triumphant; whilst truth groans miserable and oppressed. No, Mr. Owen, Heaven forbid that I should wish for peace!”

“And pray what would you wish for?”

“For war instead of mere quarrelling. I respect attack as much as I despise abuse. I long for the day when facts and argument shall take the place of falsehoods and insults; when the battles of truth shall be fought with Truth’s own arms, truths—and not with the arms of her step-sister, Slander—lies.”

He was leaning back in an arm-chair; from its depths he looked at her half mistrustfully; all

this sounded fair, but was it true? In her eyes and in her face he saw, however, nothing but sincerity. There was a pause, then he said carelessly :

“Is Timon a slanderer?”

“No—nor a misanthrope either.”

“How so, pray?”

“A misanthrope is one that loves his kind and has been deceived in them. I acquit Timon of having ever wasted much trust or love on human nature.”

Timon bowed as if he felt the compliment; she continued :

“Timon is simply a disappointed and a revengeful man.”

This time he did not bow. The definition was true and pitiless; it stung him, but too proud to show this, he merely said :

“You are quite right, Miss Lee, he has been disappointed. Ay, and he has had good cause for revenge, too,” he added bitterly, as if he still

smarted under the recollection of his wrongs, "I know myself; I am a hard man; but I required little of others; I placed myself on the path of none; I was not ambitious."

"Indeed you were," interrupted Grace.

"Excuse me; I was going to add—beyond my deserts. The position I was fit for and had a right to, I claimed—for more I never asked. And how have I been treated from boyhood to youth—from youth to manhood?"

"I dare say not much worse than other people," put in Grace with provoking composure.

"Not much worse!" he echoed, with an indignant laugh. "Pray what, then, is the world's way of dealing with men?"

"A very fair way," she answered with prompt decision.

"Fair!" he repeated, looking at her. Grace went on working silently; he waited for her to justify her opinion, but she seemed to consider the question settled. Clever man though he was, he

fell into the trap laid for him, and broke forth indignantly :

“Fair ! have I then been fairly treated ? My birth was obscure ; I was not ashamed of it ; but who ever allowed me to forget that my father had been a pawnbroker and my mother a Jewess ; I valued not money, but I valued what is called pleasure still less. The extravagant taunted me with sparing gold, coined out of the pence of the poor. I despised quarrelling and fighting, bullies called me a coward—as if because the blood of a despised race flowed in my veins, scorn and contumely were the only food fit for me. For some time I bore this, then suddenly I turned round and showed the dastard crew that the patience of my Jewish forefathers had not at least come down to me. The dull I chastised once for all. For the insolent I kept the keener weapons of ridicule and sarcasm ; they thought to retaliate ; but finding me more than a match for them they slunk off. Henceforth there was silence around me ; the

silence of hatred, I knew it, but they had not taught me to care for their love."

"A propitious beginning!" drily said Miss Lee. Too much absorbed to heed the interruption, he continued:

"Years came upon me thick and fast. My youth submitted to the yoke of but one passion—ambition. Here, too, was cause for strange reproach. The vicious hated me because I shared not their vices; the virtuous thought it unnatural that my life remained blameless as their own. I laughed at them all, and kept myself free from degrading shackles. To submit to an angel as I saw some men submit to the most worthless of their sex, would have quelled pride and respect for ever."

"But, Mr. Owen," quietly observed Grace, "these are mere trifles; and I dare say if you would only look at it in a right way—you would find in the subsequent portion of your life still less reason to complain of the world."

"Ah!" he said, astonished at her coolness.

"Why, yes; for instance you studied medicine, then forsook it for the bar—thus your first step in life was a mistake—"

"For which I blame none," he jealously interrupted. "Pray do not think I complain of my early struggles; that I reproach the world with the toil to which I voluntarily devoted years, or call society to account, because during that long probation, she never once stretched forth to me a friendly or a helping hand. Proud, strong and self-reliant, what did I want from her? Even when I had done all man can do alone—I defy any living being to say I asked her for more than a fair field and no favour."

"Which you got," decisively put in Grace. "I know you do not think so. You are disappointed, you feel bitter; but depend upon it, you—"

"Indeed, Miss Lee," he interrupted, impatiently, "this is too much! I claim to be no exception; far from it, I aver that a fair chance

of success is not granted to one man in a thousand. When I entered the world you defend so zealously, I found it arrayed in terror and in arms against all new comers; opposing to them a front as firm and steady as that of an army on a battle day. I found it assumed as granted that there never could be again any man like the men that had been; that to follow in their steps was common-place and tame; to strike out a new path a dangerous and absurd innovation. I learned, moreover, in many a slight, and many a sneer, that a well established name and reputation were the only warrants of merit, even as success was its only test. I heard the Past and the Present uniting to denounce the Future. 'You are not wanted,' they querulously cried; 'you are troublesome; you are dangerous; you upset the legitimate order of things; every place is full; there is no room for you; sufficient are we to the wants of this generation. Begone!' Vain and fatuitous assertion, repeated day after

day, year after year, age after age, and as unavailing against the tide of posterity as the 'Come no further' of Canute to the sea.

"And that flood which so firmly beat against the bulwarks of society and which I now entered—what was it? The same world under democratic guise. The very scum and dregs of human nature; frenzied ambition grasping at every prize with the power to win none; strength without its magnanimity pitilessly trampling down the weak; a band of middle-age condottieri besieging a fat burgher city, and more hungry for plunder than athirst for renown. There was war too in this unruly horde—war silent but deadly; how sternly the foremost ranks kept back the hindermost! how firmly they would have crushed the foremost if they but could!

"Sometimes the citadel above, that seat of luxury and ease, capriciously opened its gates to receive some chosen one who, like all deserters, straight became the bitterest foe of those he

had left behind. I have never heard scorn more keen, never seen hatred more relentless, than from the successful to the unlucky, the victorious to the conquered. Was I better than they with and against whom I strove? I do not say so, but surely I could not be worse. What a life was ours! What a burning atmosphere of fever and strife brooded over us and wrapped us all in its lurid shadow!"

He paused; in his eager look, in his pale thin features, in his parted lips, seemed to revive the feverish excitement of that time.

"Well!" said Grace.

He looked up at her like one wakening from a dream.

"Pray go on!" she said impatiently.

"With what?"

"With your history of course."

She looked eager and interested. Unconsciously he felt soothed and flattered. There is a deep and subtle egotism in your clever men, to

which even the coldest and most self-denying must yield sometimes—and to the weakness John Owen yielded now.

“Well,” he resumed, “I was not amongst the fortunate. Day after day I saw men inferior to me in knowledge and power, succeed and thrive. I knew why: they could fawn and flatter; things impossible to me. Yet I confess it honestly, their triumphs galled me. Without troubling you, Miss Lee, with the story of disappointments that still found me an obscure, unknown man, leading a life of poverty and toil, suffice it to say, that chance made me meet again with Captain Glawdon. He gave me hopes he never intended to fulfil. All he meant was to get from me legal advice and information, without paying for either; yet he lured me on with a resistless bait; an opportunity of being heard and known. Obscurity is narrow and stifling. I panted for air and space to breathe. I saw through the man; I trusted not his honour or his faith; but

to the triumph of a vigorous mind over a feeble intellect; to the power of a strong will to bend even meanness and deceit to its own end. I forgot that the mean are insolent; that the cunning are full of low arts. He wanted to break with me; I defeated his object; at length I yielded. I believe you know how this was accomplished; you know at least of the duel which you succeeded in preventing. I felt that you acted through Mr. Gerald Lee. He must have had strange power over his relative, for he made him withdraw his challenge, and apologise to the man he had insulted. I knew that I had a foe the more on my path; but I despised, and did not fear him. I returned to London; there I received from you an invitation that led to my introduction to a certain circle. And now, Miss Lee," he added, raising his eyes until they met hers, "allow me to pause in this long egotistical narrative, in order to thank you: I had done nothing to conciliate your favour, but much, had

you been resentful, to win me your dislike or hatred. Another woman, in your proud and envied position, would assuredly, by some slight, some scorn, have made me pay the penalty of my pride, and with look, or smile, or tone sweetly galling, have taught me, once for all, that a poor and struggling barrister was something less than a man for a worshipped heiress. I found you just,—more than just, generous. You tried to serve me, and you exacted no return of flattery or homage. In the little there was between us I always found you better and greater than myself. Above and beyond you I may be in some things, but of us two, you are assuredly the higher-minded and the more magnanimous. I confess it as willingly because true, as I should scornfully deny it if false. More I will add: I thank you, Miss Lee, for being the only one who ever treated me as a man and a gentleman.”

He looked at her with a smile, proud spite of so frank a confession. Grace gave him back a

look and a smile as proud as his own. She knew that if he could have helped it he would scarcely have said so much ; that of the homage, the best part was yielded to truth ; to her little ; to the woman certainly nothing.

“ Mr. Owen,” she said, after a pause, which he forgot to break, “ how comes it that the introduction to which you allude availed you so little ? ”

The gloom returned to his brow ; the scornful light to his dark eye, the sneer to his ironical lip, as he answered sarcastically :

“ The Honourable Mrs. Chesterfield wanted a thousandth and one adorer of her perfections ; Mr. Woodman, a tool for his rancour against a man of genius ; Mr. Hanley, a toady and a boon companion. None of these people cared a rush to serve me. I do not blame them, but neither was I going to be their fool or their slave. I soon lost their favour, or, rather, I never won it ; but I saw something of them, and they might

have proved of use to me in the end, when I could not but perceive that a cloud had gradually come between them and me.

“Mrs. Chesterfield was strangely cool, and disdainful and impertinent. I was once with her when some officers came in ; I forget of what we spoke, but in the progress of our discourse, her eye fell on me with a scorn so insulting, that I rose and left the house, which I have never entered since that day. Woodman, on the contrary, became more familiar and patronising ; he was then deep in his scheme of hiring me to book-making, a thing I hated. He coaxed, he wheedled in vain ; he dropped strange hints about pluck and mettle ; he kindly assured me Brandon was not dangerous ; that the war of books was a pacific war ; that rivals of the pen seldom proceeded to perilous extremities. I laughed in his face, and asked him if he thought I feared anything mortal or any living being ? He coughed, and smiled, and said, “Oh dear,

no !' with this we dropped the subject ; he went his way, I mine, but with me went his smile and his 'Oh dear, no !' I know not, however, how I might have interpreted either, but for Mr. Hanley. He had taken a fancy to me ever since I had detected the presence of oysters in the *ambrosie à la Lee*. He often asked me to his table ; my very heart burned with impatience and wrath to see that whilst, without cost to himself, he could have brought me to the gate of my wishes, he found me no better task than to con over dishes and talk cookery. Yet I bore it ; I hoped that he who had once been a poor and a struggling man would help me yet. He never did. He did not want me to succeed, and he lost to him ; so he gave me hopes and kept me back for the sake of a poor and selfish indulgence. But as our acquaintance grew closer, he became cynical, ironical, almost insolent. Cautiously at first, in the end openly, he tried to make me the butt of his sarcasms. I began

to understand there must be something in all this; that Mrs. Chesterfield, that Woodman, that Hanley would never dare to use me so, if they did not feel assured of impunity. I had suspicions, but I wanted certitude; so I kept my blood cool, I allowed Hanley full play, I subdued wrath, I silenced passion. My patience won its reward. The subtle old cynic told me voluntarily, in a genial after-dinner moment, what no questioning would have extracted from him at another time. 'I might be no hero,' he said, 'but I should live all the longer. Indeed, he had no doubt that I should reach the threescore and ten, whilst that hare-brained Glawdon could not fail being shot or spitted out of life one of these days.'

"Thus I learned it all: Captain Glawdon had told and falsified the story of the duel; he had proclaimed me a coward, and on his word the world had believed it.

"A coward!" resumed John Owen after a

pause, and the veins in his forehead swelled passionately, and his eyes burned with a light that grew more keen and clear as he proceeded ; “ A coward ! the meanest thing that ever felt the sun’s light or breathed air of earth ! And I was stung thus in my honour and my pride by one who had meanly wronged and basely insulted me ! I scorned to deny the accusation until I could prove it false. I never breathed his name until we met. I had watched my opportunity in the broad daylight, in a crowd, face to face ; and then not behind his back, like a traitor, but to his face like a man, I gave him the lie. He never answered ; his look could not meet my look, his tongue repel the deadly insult mine had uttered clear and distinct for all to hear ; he merely trembled and turned pale, cowered and slunk away mute. Many wondered, for he was thought brave. I did not wonder : a dastard can stand the shot of a foe better than the look of a man.

“ Days and weeks passed ; I heard nothing of

him; the insolence and the scorn passed from the manner of those with whom I chanced to mingle; coward I was thought no longer; I had proved no physical courage, yet I got it for granted. Captain Glawdon at length made up his mind, and sent me a challenge.

“I hate duelling. I abhor that appeal to a random shot or gladiator thrust as I abhor all that is low and brutal. The first time Captain Glawdon challenged me, my pride rose and my blood boiled to think that for the caprice of a fool I was to peril every chance of my ambition; that my life, a keen, intellectual life, full of projects and aims, was to stand the same chance, and be measured in the same scale as that of an effeminate dandy. But the second time the Captain challenged me, I felt differently. I protest against being what is called a humane or a philanthropic man. This may be the age of peace societies, of abolition movements, of sympathy meetings; but, I confess it, these

things sicken me. To the attacked I say, defend yourselves even unto death; to the slave, rise against the tyrant, and be free; to the oppressed, scorn sympathy that spends itself in speech. In the same mood, I can look on the suffering and the death of others, not with pleasure, but without morbid horror or grief. Pain is our lot, death our end; let both, then, be borne without making all this outcry about an everyday matter. At the same time I am neither butcher nor executioner; to torment is repugnant to me as a surgeon; to give death in war or duelling—I protest I can see no difference—would be still more so. Now, on the day when I met Captain Glawdon I had seen death written on his brow and vanquished in his eye. I knew that if we met as foes meet, he was doomed. I said so to the military gentleman who called upon me, and I declined the challenge. He remonstrated, and assured me such conduct in a gentleman was without precedent. I offered to

meet him if he liked ; ‘for you, at least,’ I said, ‘have a fair chance—he has not.’ He did not think fit to accept my offer, and withdrew, impressed and astonished. I have heard that he reported me to his friend as an evil-minded man, and strongly advised him to arrange the matter ; but Captain Glawdon was bent on his fate. I soon received a second challenge ; again I refused it ; but when a third message came, I said, ‘Be his blood on his own head, and his death at his own door !’

“Dark and tragic, if rightly told, would be the story of that day. Strange that in a world so wide two men could not find room to move and not meet. I remember I thought of that as in the gray of early morning I stood by the fresh hawthorn hedge and listened to the rising song of the lark in a neighbouring corn-field ; whilst he, miserable man, moved restlessly to and fro, and sang snatches of a glee, and our two witnesses pedantically discussed a doubtful point in this

false code of a falser honour. You look pale, Miss Lee ! well I assure you, that if one could forget the end, nothing can be less terrible to see than a duel. When two angry men appeal to brute force, and grapple in their strength for mastery, the contest is often long, and always sickening to behold ; but in a duel it is quiet, swift, silent and deadly as the hate that has brought the two combatants to that solitary spot. A few minutes and all was over ; his shot passed by me harmless ; mine wounded him slightly ; his wished to reach my heart ; mine to miss him ; we both failed. Every precaution had been taken ; law could not touch us ; the matter was kept quiet. I was relieved and astonished ; my enemy lived spite of presentiment and sign. His wound healed fast ; it healed until it opened afresh, and ended in a mortal fever, that in a few weeks laid him in his grave. I heard it, and would rather that no hand of mine had helped to bring him there. He was not good, he was not honourable ; but life was

given to all, and to all seems sweet. Again I asked myself, was earth not wide enough for him and me?"

There was a low remorseful cadence in his voice as he made this confession, and paused. But suddenly he looked up and said, abruptly :

"Be frank, Miss Lee. What do you think of me in this?"

"I think," she replied, very gravely, "that the God who had made you both, against whose gentle law of brotherly love and holy peace you both rebelled and sinned, is your only judge."

He had not expected an answer so mild in form, so severe in its spirit. He bit his lip and retorted :

"And you charitably deliver me up to judgment. Well, no matter! But you misunderstood me, Miss Lee: I was asking you for your opinion."

"I think," she calmly answered, "that with

many ways of proving yourself no coward, you chose the worst and the least conclusive. Moral cowardice is at the bottom of nine out of ten of the duels fought daily. However, if I go on, I shall fall into the commonplace truths every one knows, every one confesses, and no one has the daring and the manliness to put in practice. This much, however, there is to say in your extenuation; the unfortunate man brought on his own fate, and the world that abetted him was far more guilty than you of the deed, for which, if I mistake not, its laws attempted to render you responsible."

"Oh! no," bitterly replied John Owen; "law did not touch me; there was no inquest of justice: but opinion, that immaculate Themis, became coroner, and delivered her verdict without granting me the benefit of witness or jury. She had once proclaimed me a coward. She now branded me as a murderer and a fiend. To whosoever wished to listen, she told by what

deadly insults I had driven an honourable man, husband of a most interesting young wife, father of an innocent child, to meet me in mortal combat. She stigmatised my enmity as that of the dastard who dares not to stand by his own deed. 'Another,' she said, 'would have shot his foe dead, then surrendered himself manfully to take his trial. But I'—ingenious was the heart that conceived the calumny; pure the mind that rounded the tale; guileless the tongue that uttered it—'I, once a medical man, had found to the life of my victim a slower and a safer way—I had calculated the shot that inflicted the wound—that brought on the fever that led—to death!' The monstrous invention was told, spread, and believed. Mrs. Chesterfield, meeting me once by chance, fainted gracefully in her carriage at the sight of such a monster. Woodman had just then got hold of a fit tool; a man with talent enough to write a book, and not too much to write at

another man's bidding. The result appeared in a novel, of which I was hero: and a gentleman-like villain they made me out. A coward, a traitor, a profligate, an apostate, an atheist, a usurer, a socialist, a spy—everything, save a fool. That, I am bound to confess, either in or out of the book, I sincerely believe no one ever called me.” His lip took a disdainful curl, and he proceeded: “I read this book, of which the preface was not the least edifying part. In it the reader was gravely assured that the ‘Son of Darkness’—such was the title—was no idle creation of the writer’s brain. No; he still lived to bewilder and appal his fellow-creatures. He walked amongst men with the mark of Cain on his brow, and on his lips the sneer of Satan.—But why trouble you with such trash?—There was notoriety in the book; every one read it. If I could have stooped to deny charges so calumnious, accusations so infamous, I should have held myself a justly degraded man. I let

slander say her worst; she flung dirt at me, and I, remembering that it *was* dirt, defiled not myself with handling of it. More defiant, as she grew more insulting, I went on my way and heeded her execrations no more than the traveller heeds the barking of curs on the high road. At length, it came to this point between society and me, that, I may say it without boasting, we met face to face in a narrow pass. She told me plainly that she would hunt me out of hearth and home. I swore that if my life should be the price, I would keep inviolate and free the sacred right of every man to work for the bread he eats, for the roof that shelters him. I then made out a precarious living—not by the bar, for though I got a motion now and then, I was no favourite in the court—but by reports for a newspaper and reviews for a magazine. I earned little; but I lived sparingly, and owed nothing to any man. On this poor pittance others, poorer than myself,

cast the looks of greediness and envy. The opportunity was good, blasted as I was in character and name, to oust me from my barren heritage. I fought for it, as a monarch for his kingdom. I dared living man to wrest it from me; placed defenceless between the two fires of rivals and employers, by braving them alike, I silenced, ay, and I quelled them both. I stood alone; my foes were many, yet they retreated, sullen and daunted.

“If I am proud of anything in my life, it is of that struggle and of that victory. But when it was won; when, though they might detest me, I compelled men to grant me that sort of respect which they yield to power—good or evil. When there was the peace, and again, as in my boyhood, the silence of hatred around me,—insulted manhood asserted his rights, injured honour her wrongs. Voluntarily I yielded, what compulsion would never have wrested from me. I gave back society the reluctant and niggardly portion I had

wrung from her inch by inch: my seat at her board,—my resting place beneath her roof,—my right to her highways and barren places. When the vassal surrenders his fief, he also surrenders his allegiance, and stands once more a stripped, but a free man before his lord. To that proud lady, who had poured on me the vials of her contempt and her wrath, I now gave back scorn for scorn. I wrote ‘Timon,’ not for justification, but for revenge. Of myself I said nothing—of her much. I tore the veil from the brow of this mock vestal, and to her own gaze I showed her in her unblushing shame. I told her she was a coward, for that to the weak she was pitiless, and fawning to the strong; a traitor, for that she daily bartered the holiest gods of her worship for Baal and Mammon; a liar, for that she publicly dealt in lies, lived and thrived on them, on pledges broken from man to man,—on oaths betrayed from class to class,—on treaties forsworn from nation to nation. With this I left her.

“ ‘Timon’ sold well, and read even better than the ‘Son of Darkness.’ Who knows but I might not have achieved a literary reputation! But content with this Parthian shaft I had dealt my foe, I sought obscurity as I had once sought fame. I resumed the profession I had forsaken, and came and settled here more wearied than crushed—more scornful than conquered.”

His lip curled with the disdainful smile familiar to it, and his eyes dark and deep-set, shot forth a sullen and defiant light.

“Mr. Owen,” quietly said Grace, “I have heard you to the end, and I am going to give you a good sound dose of Job’s-friend comfort. I shall kindly prove to you that you have got no more than you deserved. To begin. Did you forget, or did you not know, that two things are indispensable to lead a peaceful life in the world,—leniency to error; forgiveness of wrong. Believe me it was for not having practised either, that when the dark hour came to you, which

comes to every man, you found many your foes—none your friend.”

“I wanted the friendship of none,” he replied, haughtily.

“The world must be with or against some men. For them—and you are one of them—there can be no medium.”

He did not contradict what he felt to be true. She continued.

“It was not for you. You would not practise the world’s ways, and the world gave you none of its rewards. It kept them for flatterers and parasites. Would you have been of them?”

“I!” he exclaimed, indignant at the suggestion.

“Well, then, do not complain,” was her inexorable rejoinder, “you would not pay the trader’s price, why should you get the trader’s goods?”

“They are not merchandise to be sold and bought,” he replied, half impatiently, “but prizes to be fought for and won.”

“In the first place, I deny it; in the second, granting it, I aver that your own words condemn you. If the world is a battle-field, on which you have been beaten—Soldier! know how to bear with the fortune of war.”

“Job’s-friend comfort indeed, this!” said John Owen, with a lofty smile.

Miss Lee composedly proceeded on her course of consolatory remarks :

“I know what you think; that you ought to have won. Quite a mistake! Success is a matter of temper far more than of genius. Genius you have, I believe; but you know you are not amiable.”

“Eh?” he interrupted, amazed.

“Well, are you?” she said frankly; “I put it to you: are you an amiable man?”

“Perhaps not,” he at length answered.

“I assure you,” she candidly replied, “that you may put ‘perhaps’ out of the question.”

“Well, you are frank,” he said, after another

pause ; " but pray go on : you were saying that success is a matter of temper far more than of genius—a just remark."

" Of course it is ; I never make any but just remarks. However, you have interrupted me, the thread of my thoughts is broken, and so, without entering into further observations, all I have to say is, you have been worsted—submit to Fate !"

" Fate !" he exclaimed with a start. " I repudiate the slavish doctrine, Fatalism—I scorn it ; man—underneath God—has no master save his own will, strong or weak."

" Hm-m," said Grace ; " and so it was your own free will brought you here—a conquered man ?"

" Conquered—conquered," he repeated, rather indignantly ; " disgusted and wearied—not conquered, if you please."

Grace laid down her work, which she had resumed, and looked at him with a penetrating glance, and a peculiar smile.

“Disgusted!” she said slowly. “Mr. Owen, you have always been too clear-sighted, and consequently too dispassionate, to be so easily disgusted. And wearied, too! Surely you do not mean to say your nature is so weak as to know satiety and weariness? I do not think it is. I do not think the wide-spread fame of a Byron, the power of a Napoleon, would sate or satisfy your ambition.”

He half turned round, with not displeased wonder, to look deep into one who could read him so truly. She continued,—

“It was not weariness, but scorn that brought you here. Strange mistake! Your position, after ‘Timon’ appeared, was splendid, not as an author, but as a man. Victoriously had you proved the power that justifies—excuse my plain speaking—an imperious temper. Besides, the world likes to hear truths so stern, told with such eloquent bitterness: It must be tyrant or slave. It often spurns its worshippers to kiss

the hand that wields the lash. Had you but kept your ground the day was yours."

John Owen smiled with ironical scepticism.

Miss Lee resumed :

"You left the field when the battle was all but won. You look cool and phlegmatic as a Saxon, but in reality you have hot Welsh blood. So you lost your temper, and scorned Fortune, when she was smiling. She left you, and with her fled the golden opportunity that returns not twice in a man's life. 'Timon,' as a book, is already forgotten. 'Timon,' as a man, must abide by his choice, and vegetate quietly to the end of his days. An obscure end for so many proud dreams; but one at least that unites philosophic quietness and peace."

A demure smile played around her lips as she uttered the last words. Her guest looked at her with something like wrath. It stung his proud heart to be told in those calm tones that the paths of life were closed upon him. Only that

same pride forbade the boast, "That if he wished he could yet shape a way." So he swallowed down the insult, for such it seemed to him, and merely said, with ill-subdued irritation, "I do not believe in your Fortune, Miss Lee; she is but a Fate in disguise."

"Well, I believe in her—perhaps because she has been invariably kind to me."

"Miss Lee, is this quite frank? I say honestly that I am not satisfied with my lot; you always speak as if the fulness of happiness had fallen to yours."

"You doubt it. Why so? Speak plainly."

"Why! Because, when I look at you I seem to see two women. One, I remember her well, treated more like a divinity."

"To her face," tartly said Grace. "I need not leave this room to find one who made no divinity of me behind my back."

"I perceive I offend you," said John Owen, prudently oblivious of the incident she recalled.

"No; but you exaggerate. What though I have been outrageously flattered! You forget that I did not perhaps receive that flattery as Gospel truth."

"What matter; the incense was given to you—where is it now?"

"Wreathing sweetly and gracefully around the feet of some other idol. Let it! Do I look broken-hearted?"

"Well, you certainly might have too much sense to care for flattery."

"Might!" murmured Grace;—"civil."

"But were you as indifferent to friendship? When I saw you in this house a sister was with you; there was a friend, too; the world called him more than friend. Where are they now? Married, enjoying the noble fortune that once was yours; and you are here, comparatively poor, and certainly alone."

"The fortune has but changed hands," warmly replied Grace, "the friends are but absent. In

justice to them I must enlighten you, Mr. Owen. My marriage with Gerald Lee was the condition on which I enjoyed Miss Lee's wealth; that condition I broke of my own free-will, for motives which neither Mr. Lee nor Miss Blount influenced. If Gerald Lee," she added, raising her head, and speaking with mingled dignity and pride, "had betrayed his faith with me, know that I would have compelled him to betray it openly. I might have accepted the wrong, but I would have made him take the shame. If Lily, who, though not of my blood, is dear to me as a sister; if Lily Blount could have attempted to seduce from me the regard of my affianced husband, I might not, for the sake of womanhood, have proclaimed it to the world, but I should have thought of it in my heart until love died, withered by contempt. And now," she added, with a warmer flush on her cheek and a half smile on her lips, "let me not, whilst justifying Mr. Lee from treachery, place him in the unfortunate

position of a rejected lover. I know he respected and liked me ; he certainly wished to marry me ; but then—but then—I do not think it broke his heart to lose me. Lily is young ; she is fair and beautiful as an angel ; I am dark and plain like a common mortal woman. In short, what wonder is it that he was so soon comforted—and married ? ”

“ But you ! ” said John Owen, looking at her keenly. She laughed freely at his evident mistrust.

“ I ! ” she said, gaily, “ well I did not want comfort, did I ? Have I not exchanged the hot and barren world for cool and shady solitude ; and, pleasanter still, fortune for happy liberty ? ”

There was a pause, then he said, “ I admire you ; I envy you. ”

“ But you do not half believe in me, ” she interrupted. “ Yet Diocletian, the vegetable gardener and tiller of the earth, thought himself a happier

man than Diocletian, the master of Rome. By the way," she added, rising, "I must show you my garden—yours is shamefully neglected—and try and convert you to flowers. You cannot deny their beauty."

"Yes, they are lovely weeds enough," he carelessly replied, following her out through the glass door.

The evening, though chill, was beautiful and calm. Just above the dark outline of the hills spread a space of light cold and clear as that of a Polar sky. Beyond it vast clouds seemed to repose on their own broad base; in the west a young crescent moon shone white and pure in blue space.

"You are bareheaded, you will take cold," suddenly said John Owen, pausing.

"No, thank you. No day is too hot, no night too chill for me. But pray look at my flowers; colourless and dim though they seem, are they not still beautiful?"

He did not reply ; he had truly said it, flowers for him were but lovely weeds.

Miss Lee went on, still pouring forth on her favourites praise, that fell on a careless ear. As they reached the gate that bounded her narrow domain, she stopped short, and said, "This reminds me of Madame Helvétius visited by General Bonaparte, and showing him her garden. 'General,' she said, as they parted, 'you do not know how much happiness an acre of ground can enclose.' The future Napoleon heard her with a disdainful smile. And you too—though like the master of the world, you have found your Saint Helena—you too, Mr. Owen, would disdain happiness so tame and so easily won. Would it were yours, however, and that the home to which you are now returning, were as calmly happy as that you leave." She unlocked and opened the gate as she spoke.

"A cool and civil way of telling me to be off," rather indignantly thought John Owen. He

noticed too, that in bidding him adieu, Miss Lee did not invite him to renew his visit. She stood by the open gate, however, looking after him. As he turned the path, she called him back. "Mr. Owen."

He looked round, but did not move. She glanced significantly at a pool of wet that lay between them, then at her satin slippers, and said:—

"I want to speak to you, if you please." He came back a few steps.

"Come again, will you?" she said, carelessly.

"Perhaps so," he replied, in tones quite as careless.

"Perhaps! No, Mr. Owen, not perhaps; yes or no, if you please."

"Oh! in that case, yes, of course."

"I do not like, 'yes, of course.' It implies constraint and a bore. Come again if you like it, and if you do not, stay away."

"Precisely."

“But pray do not hurry, take your time to consider: in the meanwhile, good-night.”

He turned away, and she locked the gate.

END OF VOL. I.







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